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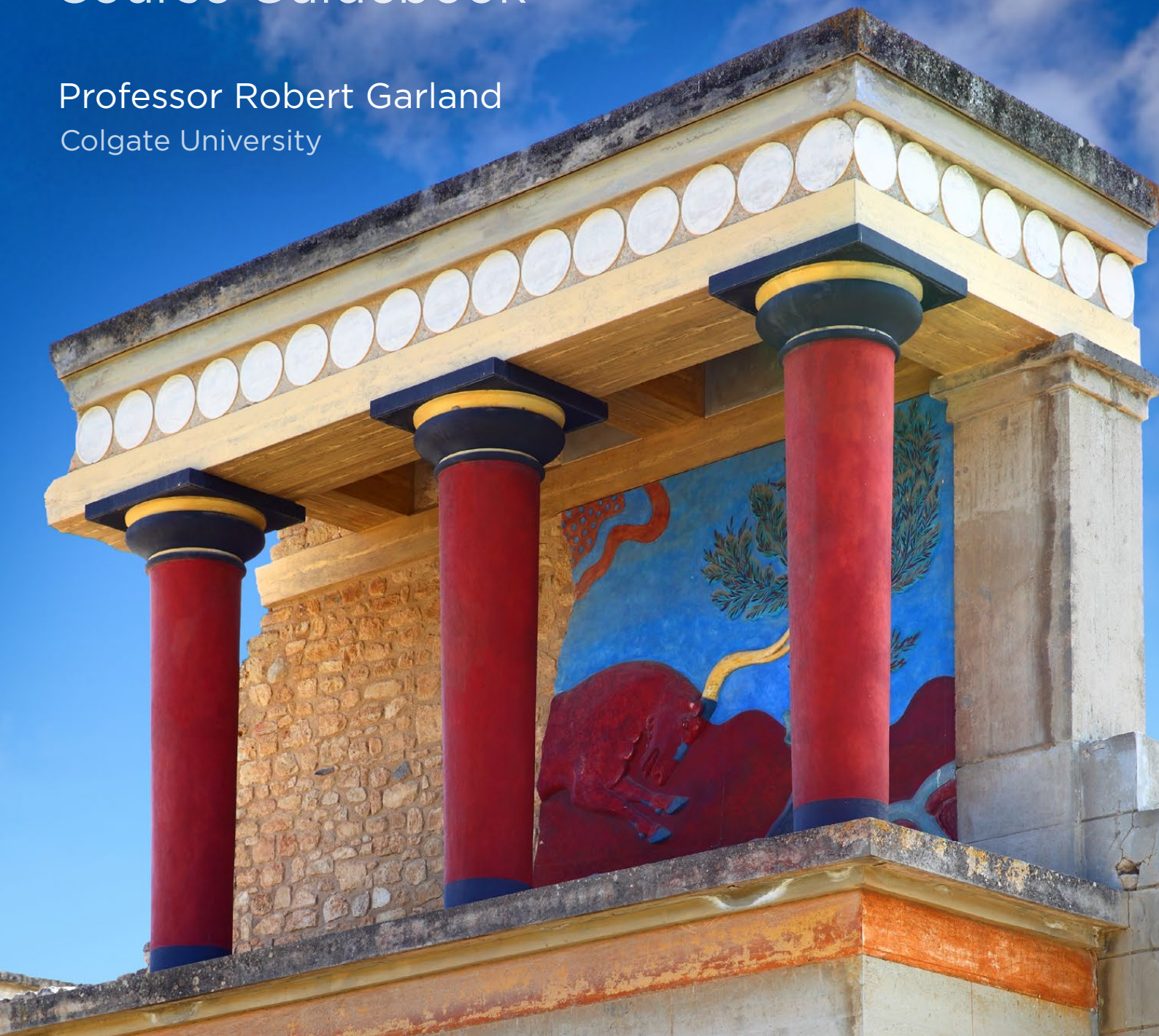
# The Greek World

## A Study of History and Culture

Course Guidebook

Professor Robert Garland
Colgate University



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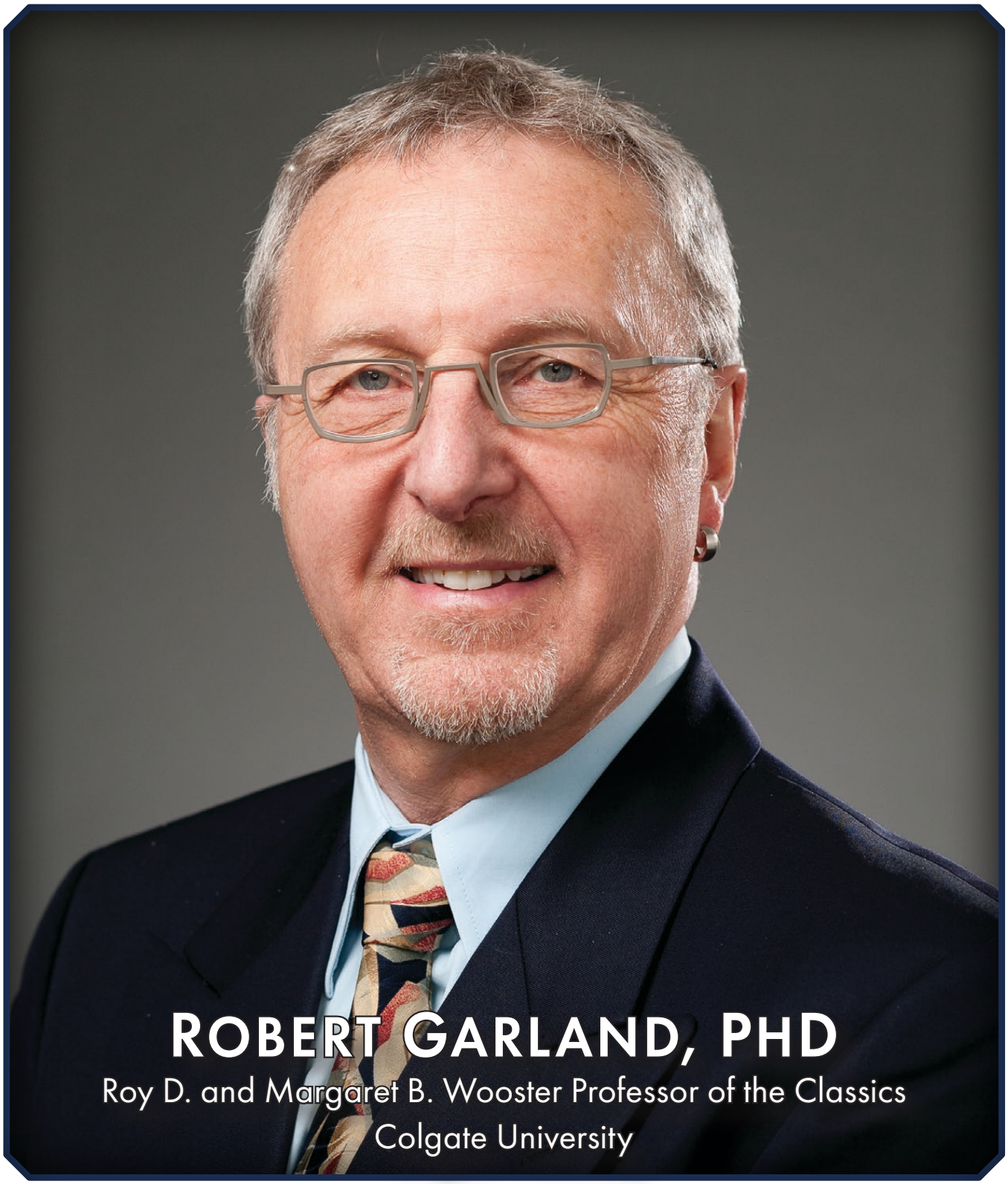


Robert Garland is the Roy D. and Margaret B. Wooster Professor of the Classics at Colgate University, where he served for 13 years as chair of the Department of the Classics and was director of the Division of the Humanities. He received his BA in Classics from The University of Manchester, where he graduated with first-class honours. He obtained his MA in Classics from McMaster University and his PhD in Ancient History from University College London.

Professor Garland was the recipient of the George Grote Prize in Ancient History from the Institute of Classical Studies. He was also a Fulbright Scholar and fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington DC and a visiting scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. He has taught at the University of Reading, the University of London, Keele University, and the University of Maryland, College Park. He also was the Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professor at the University of Bristol. In addition to his 32 years of teaching classics at Colgate University, Professor Garland has taught English and drama to secondary school students and lectured at universities throughout Britain and at the British School at Athens.

Professor Garland's research focuses on the social, religious, political, and cultural history of both Greece and Rome. He has written 15 books and many articles in both academic and popular journals. His books include *The Greek Way of Death* (which has been translated into Japanese); *The Piraeus: From the Fifth to the First Century B.C.*; *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age*; *Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion*; *Religion and the Greeks* (which has been translated into Greek); *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*; *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks* (which has been translated into Greek); *Surviving Greek Tragedy*; *Julius Caesar*; *Celebrity in Antiquity: From Media Tarts to Tabloid Queens*; *Hannibal* (which has been translated into German); *Wandering Greeks: The Ancient Greek Diaspora from the Age of Homer to the Death of Alexander the Great*; *Athens Burning: The Persian Invasion of Greece and the Evacuation of Attica*; *How To Survive in Ancient Greece*; and *Gods and Heroes: In Their Own Words*. His expertise has been featured in HISTORY's *The True Story of Troy*, and he often has served as a consultant for educational film companies.

Professor Garland's other Great Courses include *Greece and Rome: An Integrated History of the Ancient Mediterranean*; *The Other Side of History: Daily Life in the Ancient World*; *Living History: Experiencing Great Events of the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*; and *Athenian Democracy: An Experiment for the Ages*.

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# The Greek World
## *A Study of History and Culture*

This course explores the enduring fascination that we have to this day with ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks—the Athenians in particular—continue to influence us through art, architecture, philosophy, drama, science, political theory, and so much more. But who were the Greeks? Or, more importantly, who did they think they were? And what does Greek identity mean today?

This course will provide a background to Greek history from Neolithic times to the present day, starting with the exploration of the Bronze Age cultures that flourished on Crete, known as the Minoan civilization, and on the mainland, known as the Mycenaean civilization; the emergence of Greece from the Dark Age; and the flourishing of Greece in the Classical period following the victory by a coalition of Greeks over the Persian invaders. The course will then examine the rise of Macedon and the spread of Greek culture under Alexander the Great, the conquest of Greece by Rome, the flourishing of the Byzantine world, the important contact between Islamic culture and Greek science and philosophy, and the subjugation of Greece by the Ottomans. Then, the course will address the rediscovery of Greek literature in the time of the Renaissance, the War of Greek Independence, the invasion of Greece by the Nazis in the Second World War, the restoration of democracy after the expulsion of the Colonels in 1974, and Greece's emergence from the debt crisis in recent memory.

This course is not, however, a straightforward history. It consistently addresses the question of who these high-achieving people were. It examines how Greek identity emerged and was forged in antiquity by a collection of city-states, of which the most powerful were Athens and Sparta. And it explores how that identity persisted under 400 years of Ottoman rule and enabled the foundation of the modern nation-state after the War of Greek Independence.

This course analyzes the many areas of human accomplishment in which the ancient Greeks excelled, including painting and sculpture; the architecture that produced the Parthenon; the medical discoveries of the legendary

Hippocrates; the tragic plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; the comic plays of Aristophanes; Herodotus's *History* (of the Greco-Persian Wars); and Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Homer's great epic poems—the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*—are also discussed, and the question is raised as to what makes epic poetry distinctive as a genre and why we should still be reading these poems today.

This course examines the origins of the Greek language and of Greek writing and illuminates how the Greek language contributed to the emergence of abstract and conceptual thinking. The course also uncovers the origins of Greek philosophy, with its attempt to explain existence without reference to the gods; its transformation under Socrates, who turned his attention to investigating human beings; and the contribution of his successor Aristotle, who identified almost every branch of scientific inquiry.

This course explains how and why mythology occupied such a central place in Greek culture. It analyzes religion, describes how the gods were perceived, and gives an account of the importance of deities in everyday life. The course also brings to life what it meant to serve as a heavily armed soldier in the Athenian army or as a rower in the navy, and it explores the central place of military service in the life of a Greek male. The status of women is investigated, and the question of what it was like to be largely confined to the home is addressed.

Greek food and drink are described, both in the ancient world and the modern. The institution known as the symposium, or drinking party, is explained, including how it was organized and run under the direction of a master of drinking, or symposiarch, whose job it was to ensure that harmony prevailed among the drinkers.

Finally, the course returns to the question of why the Greeks are worth studying and what is unique about their culture. Curious, argumentative, self-critical (and equally critical of others), restless, enterprising, and competitive, the ancient Greeks were a highly unique people who continue to have a profound influence on us today.

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LECTURE 1

# Why Study the Greek World?

Ancient Greece always has, still does, and always will mesmerize. The ancient Greeks were curious, enterprising, innovative, self-critical, argumentative, and intensely competitive. Greek culture has resonated through the centuries and continues to resonate to the present day.

# Greek Characteristics

- The ancient Greeks looked hard at the human condition and faced the horrors of life straight on. It's the Greeks who invented tragedy and drama. They were unsparing in their judgment of the indifference of the universe and of the human capacity to do evil and of the darkness of the human soul.

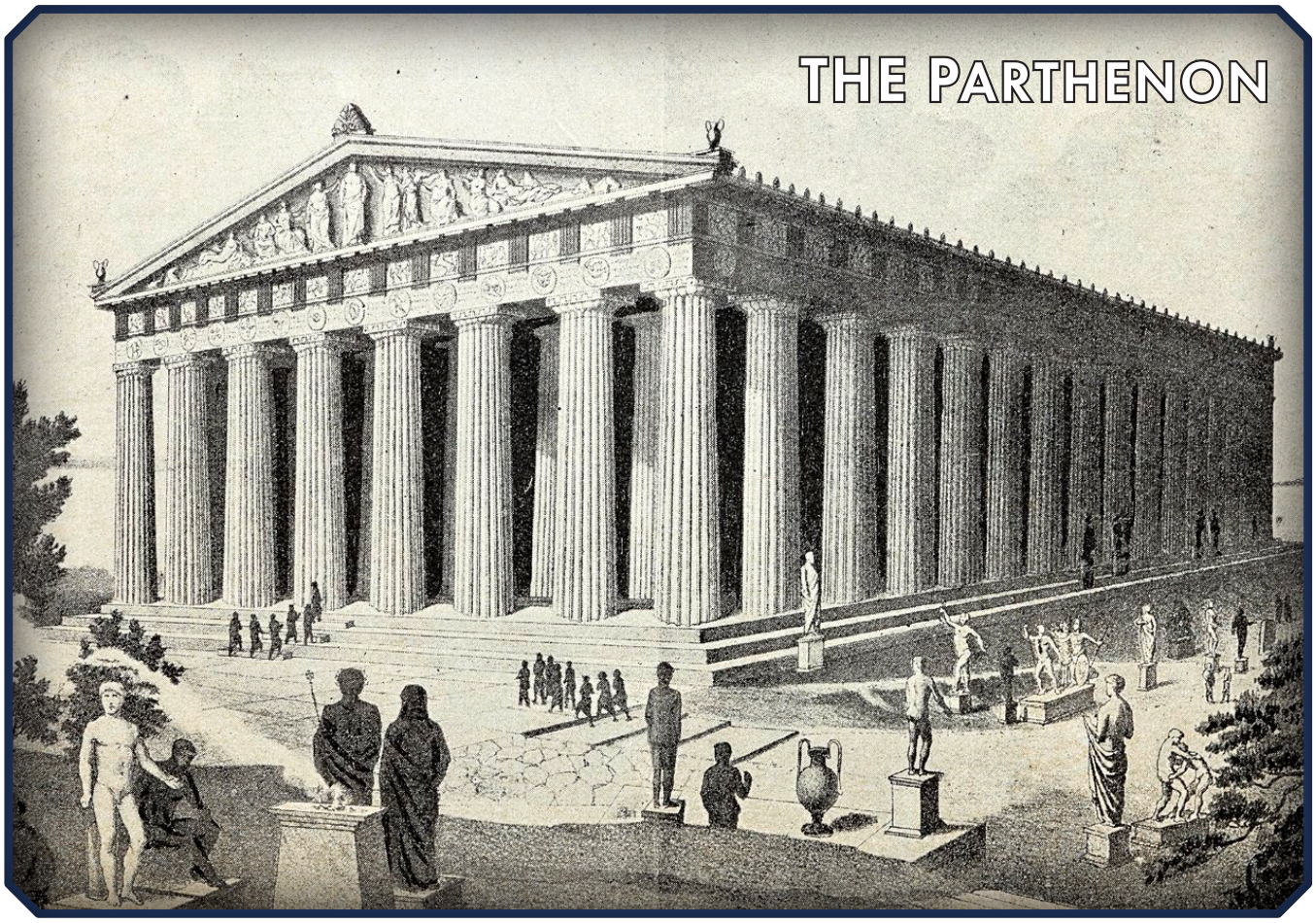
- Even though they didn't have a compulsory education system, the Greeks were very smart. Even their greatest enemies—those who see them as the originators of many of the evils of the modern world, such as slavery and sexism—can't accuse them of being stupid.

- Their intelligence probably had something to do with the political setup: the fact that most Greek communities, such as Athens, Sparta, and Corinth, were self-governing entities (poleis, or city-states) with a high commitment to civic values.

- Outside these centers, tribal systems or monarchies prevailed, though that didn't mean they were necessarily backward, even though they haven't left much behind in terms of material culture. Macedon, where Alexander the Great came from, wasn't a polis—it was a monarchy—and nobody could accuse Alexander or his father, Philip II, of being slow on the uptake.

- The ancient Greeks were restless and curious. They were highly self-critical; they were perfectionists.* Every artistic medium they tried their hand at, they excelled in. The Greeks were also very competitive. You can take competitiveness too far, but we likely need it to sustain human excellence, and that was what the Greeks were striving for.

* After erecting a temple with all its horizontal lines, two Greeks looked at the building and thought all the straight lines from the steps upward were slightly bowed. But when they measured them, they found that they weren't. So they realized it was an optical illusion, and when they next built another temple, they allowed for the optical illusion. In consequence, the Parthenon in Athens doesn't have a single straight line. All are ever-so-slightly curved.




- But the Greeks also knew that by striving for excellence, we risk paying the price of failure. When Ajax loses to Odysseus in the competition to be awarded the armor of Achilles as the best Greek warrior, Ajax goes temporarily berserk and slaughters some cattle, deludedly believing the cattle are the judges. Then, when he returns to his senses, he commits suicide because of the double disgrace.

- Paradoxically, despite their competitiveness, the Greeks were also inherently egalitarian. After all, they invented democracy. Our first glimpse of Greek society—from Homer's works—shows it as a functioning democracy. Even the Greek army holds assemblies at which even the common soldiery can speak.

# Greek Legacy

- We're indebted to the Greeks for drama, philosophy, architecture, sculpture, rational medicine, and so much more. And in thanking the Greeks, we have to thank the Romans, who were the conduit through which Greek culture reached us. The Romans knew a good thing when they saw it, and without their intervention, Greek literature might have disappeared without trace.

- At the same time, we should acknowledge the shortcomings of ancient Greeks. It is undeniable that they considered women and slaves to be intellectually, biologically, and morally inferior; they were bellicose and capable of great cruelty.

> With the exception of the slave population of Sparta, known as helots, Greek slavery was not racially based. In no Greek community would you have known whether a person was a slave by looking at his or her skin.

- But we have no right to judge our forebears. If society has moved on since antiquity, it hasn't moved on *that* far. To judge antiquity is to be ignorant of the present. We can point out that Athenian democracy wasn't a model democracy because women didn't have the right to vote, but we also must note that it was barely 100 years ago that women in America acquired the right to vote. And the reason why it took women that long to acquire the vote was because they were regarded as intellectually and morally, if not biologically, inferior to men.

- Whatever period of history you're living in, it's impossible to think outside the box. If you had lived in the ancient world, you wouldn't have been able to envisage a world without slavery. Plato and Aristotle couldn't, and there's no evidence that Jesus could, either.

- It's true that the philosophical school known as Stoicism accorded full human identity to slaves, but that wasn't a rallying cry to abolish slavery. The abolition of both slavery and serfdom are intimately connected with technological advances that have rendered them unnecessary.

# Greek Race and Ethnicity

- Years ago, there was a big controversy about whether Greek historians over the centuries had consistently and deliberately misrepresented Greek civilization by suggesting it was homegrown when it was actually the result of a fusion between Greece, the Middle East, and Egypt and that the Egyptian component was in fact black and that this "fact" had been suppressed.

- In 2017, Sarah Bond, a classics professor at the University of Iowa, made the argument that the Greeks weren't a pure-white race based on artistic evidence. This unleashed a backlash from a racist group known as Identity Evropa, whose members saw classical white marble statues as emblems of white nationalism.

- Then, in 2018, Netflix and the BBC released a miniseries called *Troy: Fall of a City*, which starred an actor of Ghanaian descent playing Achilles. Again there was a protest, this time from people claiming that "in real life" Achilles was a blond. But there is no Achilles in real life; he exists only in Greek mythology.

- Both of these examples indicate the enormous amount of social and cultural cachet that is still attached to the ancient Greeks. For better or for worse, and whichever side of the political divide we are on, many of us still want a part of them and think we need a part of them to help us assert our standing in the world.

- Then there's the issue of Macedonia, the region ruled by Philip II and later by his son Alexander the Great. In 1977, Greek archaeologist Manolis Andronicos excavated a burial site at a place called Vergina in northern Greece, thought to be the site of ancient Aegae, the capital of ancient Macedonia. There, he discovered a tomb that he identified as that of Philip II.

- This was a coup not only for Greek archaeology, but also for Greek nationalism. That's because from antiquity onward, there were doubts about whether the Macedonians were truly Greek, and the objects found in this and other royal tombs supposedly proved that they were. But how do you actually prove this sort of question when you're talking about an era before the existence of the modern nation-state?

- Language is one criterion. The problem is that there's little evidence for the language that was popularly used by Macedonians. It was probably a Greek dialect, or possibly a separate language in the Greek family, whereas the elite definitely spoke Greek.

> The safest guide to ethnic distinctiveness in antiquity is linguistic. At some point, perhaps as early as 2100 BCE or as late as 1600 BCE, speakers of what is called proto-Greek entered central and southern mainland Greece.

- Are the Greeks Europeans? The concept of Europe didn't begin to emerge until the time of Charlemagne in the late 8th and early 9th centuries. The Greek language, however, does belong to the large cluster of languages that we call Indo-European, though that doesn't take us very far, as Sanskrit and Old Persian are also Indo-European.

- The ancient Greeks didn't call themselves Greeks; they called themselves Hellenes. Our word *Greek* derives from the Latin word *Graecus*, which originally referred to a single Greek tribe.

- All non-Greeks were identified by the nomenclature *barbaros*, our word *barbarian*. In English, the word is decidedly pejorative. It means someone who is uncultivated, lacking in civilized values and conduct. In Greek, however, it's an attempt to reproduce the sound of a language you can't understand. It doesn't therefore carry the same negative connotation as it does in English.

- Generally, the ancient Greeks thought themselves superior to all non-Greeks. The two peoples with whom the Greeks had the most intense and long-standing relationship were the Persians and the Romans, and there's no doubt that they looked down on both. But there's no evidence that they did so on racial grounds.

- They saw themselves as superior to the Persians because the Persians lived under an autocracy, whereas the Greeks—whatever system of government they lived under—were, in their view, free. And the Greeks saw themselves as superior to the Romans because their culture was so much older than that of the Romans. In other words, they sneered at the Persians and the Romans primarily on cultural grounds.

- Today, Greece is a nation-state and has been since 1832, when it won its independence from the Ottoman Turks. But in the ancient world, there were no nation-states. There were merely landmasses in which people coexisted, somewhat loosely, as communities acknowledging a single identity.

- So-called Cycladic culture was focused exclusively on the islands that circle the island of Delos. Minoan culture was focused on Crete but was also more broadly spread around the Aegean Sea. Mycenaean culture was focused on the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece but also had outposts in the Aegean, including Crete.

- The people we call the Greeks, who emerged after the collapse of Mycenaean civilization, spread their culture, largely in the form of poleis not only through what today is the Greek nation-state, but also along the west coast of Turkey, in Sicily, in southern Italy, along the south shore of the Black Sea, and elsewhere. There were some 1,035 poleis—in Albania, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Georgia, Sicily, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and Egypt.

- Later, Macedon arose and dominated Greece, leading to the conquests of Alexander the Great. That period is called the Hellenistic period, because Alexander's conquests Hellenized, or Greek-ified, the East. Later, there was the Roman period, and later still was the Byzantine period, and after that the Ottoman period.

# Greek Landscape and Environment

- The landscape and environment of Greece in particular and of the Mediterranean more generally had a determinative role in the shaping of the Greek mentality and the outcome of Greek history.

- Mainland Greece is poor agriculturally; only about 30 percent is cultivatable. The soil is rich, however, so it produced grain and grapes and olives. There aren't many raw materials. There's marble and some silver, but tin for the manufacture of bronze had to be imported. This meant that from an early date, from the Bronze Age onward, the mainland Greeks had to import basic necessities.

- As a result, the Greeks developed extensive trade contacts abroad, and these had a profound impact on their culture as they absorbed ideas from more advanced societies—notably Egypt and what is today the Middle East.

- But it also meant that they had to export their growing population. This is why the Greeks established settlements around the Mediterranean, as far afield as Spain in the west and the Black Sea in the east. They became a seafaring people, which they are to some extent to this day.

- Greece is also very mountainous; at least 75 percent of it is. That is one of the reasons why, although we can talk of the Greeks as a single people, in so many ways they were bitterly divided from one another. The landscape itself divided them. There are also no navigable rivers in Greece—just dry beds in summer, rushing torrents in winter, and no lakes of any size.

- The Greeks never developed a road system, yet they were connected through language, traditions,† religion, and institutions. And at times when Greek freedom was at risk—most notably when Greece was threatened by Persia—they did manage to form a rather ramshackle coalition to take on the enemy collectively.

† One of the most important of these was the Olympic Games, which was celebrated once every four years, as it is today.

LECTURE 2

# Bronze Age Greece: Minoans and Myceneans

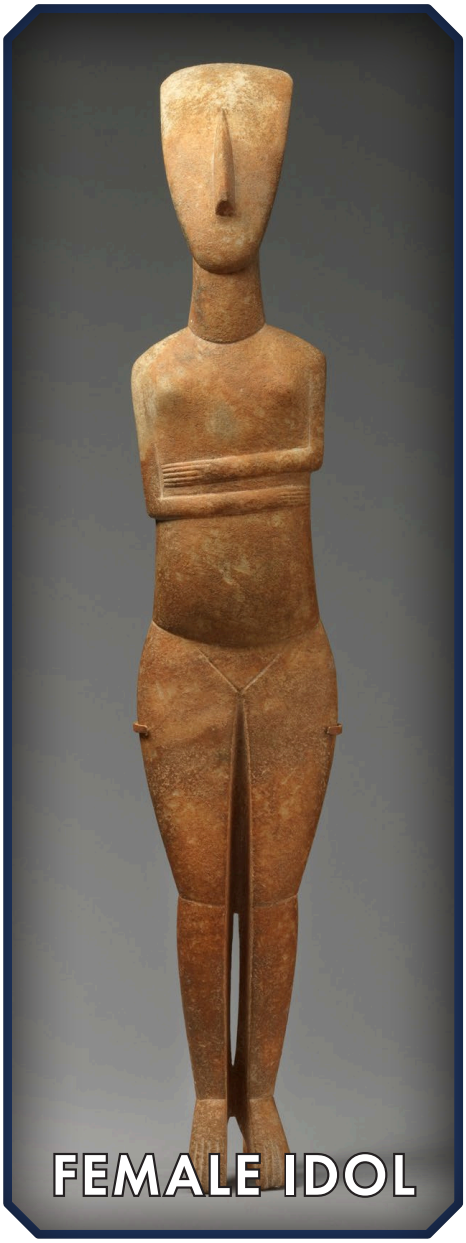
In Greece, 3000 BCE is approximately when the Neolithic period ended and the Bronze Age began. Gradually, bronze tools and weapons replaced tools and weapons made of copper and bone and stone. And the people who could afford bronze were people of high rank, so the introduction of bronze produced a more hierarchical society.

# Cycladic Culture

- The first region of what today is the nation-state of Greece that produced works of art, as we would refer to them, was the group of islands known as the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea that encircle—hence the name—the tiny island of Delos, where later Greeks claimed the goddess Artemis and the god Apollo were born. The culture produced on these islands is called Cycladic.

- But although the Cyclades are within the territorial waters of modern Greece, we have no evidence as to whether their original inhabitants were actually Greek. In other words, they may have had no ethnic link to the people who came after them whom we identify as Greek.

- Four islands in particular flourished in the Bronze Age, from around 3200 to 1050 BCE: Naxos, Melos, Skyros, and Keros. They prospered because of their reserves of gold, silver, copper, marble, and obsidian.


FEMALE IDOL

- The signature artifact of Cycladic art is the so-called female idol, though whether they were objects of worship is unlikely. They were found in graves, and the majority of them date to the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE. They look like miniature violins, though in fact they are thought to be representations of women in a squatting position.

- Some 1,400 of these figures exist, but at least half of them lack any provenance; we don't know what sites they came from because they were looted by thieves. To this day, we don't know what purpose these figures served. Some archaeologists believe they were fertility goddesses; others believe they were grave gifts.

- Sadly, Cycladic art has been at the receiving end of looters and forgers for decades. Its popularity among art collectors is due largely to the fact that from our perspective, this is a highly stylized, nonnaturalistic art, similar to most modern art. It therefore has a very fresh look about it, though we should practice caution in assuming that it was intended to be stylized.

## Minoan Civilization

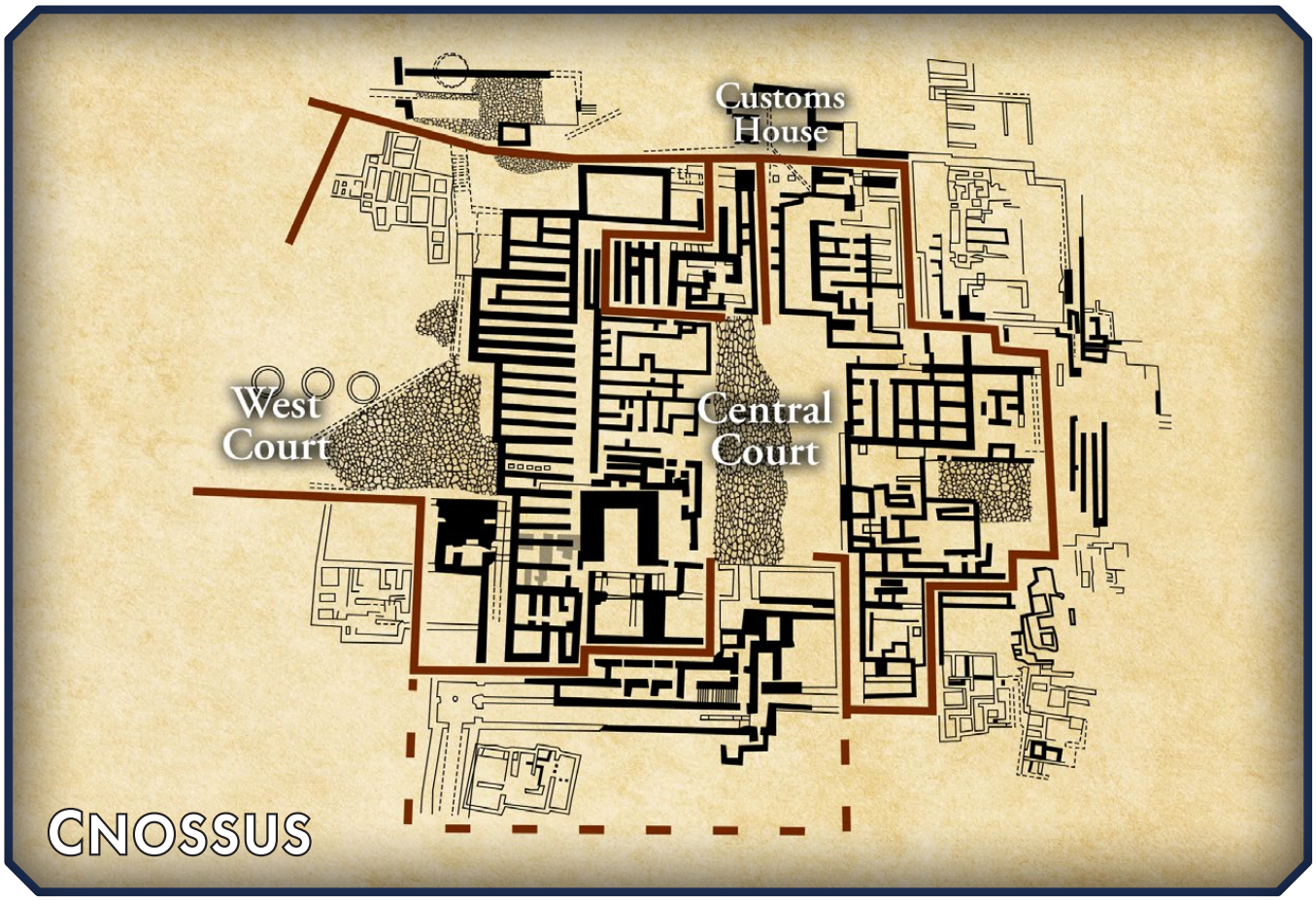
- In the 2nd millennium, our focus shifts from Cyclades to the island of Crete, which becomes the center of what we call Minoan* civilization. The most important Minoan site is Cnossus, located on the northern coast of Crete, close to the modern-day capital Heráкleion. Cnossus was excavated by the English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans at the beginning of the 20th century.

- Other important palace sites on Crete are Phaistos in the central south, Cydonia (modern-day Chania) on the northwest coast, and Zakros at the eastern tip of the island. They were first built around 2000 BCE. Around 1700, a devastating earthquake destroyed all the palaces on the island. Yet another natural disaster occurred about 1450, after which most Minoan sites were never rebuilt, though Cnossus survived, largely intact, for another 200 years.

- If you visit Cnossus today, you'll see a reconstruction that is dated to the second palatial period—i.e., post 1700—when Minoan civilization was at its height. It's largely the vision and work of Sir Arthur Evans. It's a very powerful reconstruction, but it's also very controversial since it depicts a moment of Cnossus's history frozen in time.

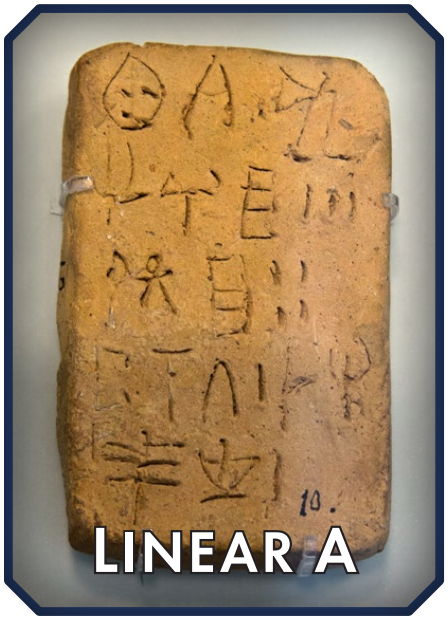
- The main problem is that it has rendered it impossible to conduct further excavations of the palace in the earlier period without destroying the reconstruction. And destroying the reconstruction wouldn't be good for the tourist industry of Crete.

* The name *Minoan* derives from Minos, a legendary king of Greece.




- The palace we see today had a central court, about 300 rooms, and a basement with two stories. There were no fortification walls, evidently because the Minoans were sufficiently unified not to need any and because they controlled the seaways. The population is estimated at 80,000.

- The Minoans were literate. A syllabic script known as Linear A was in use from the period of the first palaces, in 2000 to 1700 BCE, to the destruction of the second palaces in 1450. The fact that Linear A hasn't been deciphered means that we can't be sure whether it was Greek and therefore a precursor to Linear B, which has been deciphered and is an early form of Greek. In turn, we can't be sure whether the Minoans were Greek in terms of language and ethnicity.



- An even more vexed issue is whether the Minoans practiced human sacrifice and cannibalism. In 1972, a British archaeologist named Peter Warren excavated a house at Cnossus that contained bones with striations that looked like cuts made with a butcher's knife, suggesting that the flesh had been scraped off them. Warren believed that the bones were part of a ritual whereby Minoans fed on human flesh to achieve communion with some god.

- Later Greeks acknowledged the possibility of human sacrifice being performed in honor of both the dead and the gods. Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis to secure a favorable wind to take the Greek fleet across the Aegean to Troy, and Achilles sacrifices 12 Trojan youths to the dead Patroclus.

- One of the most prominent Minoan deities appears to have been a snake goddess, and the principal type of ritual activity seems to have been processions and dancing, along with sacrifice.† Mountain peaks and caves

† A sacrifice is being performed on a famous artifact known as the Ayia Triada sarcophagus.

were places of worship. Some 20 peak sanctuaries have been identified, as well as 15 cave sanctuaries. Animal sacrifice was performed at caves, and large bonfires were lit on mountain peaks.

- Minoan civilization was not confined to Crete. It reached the island of Thera, modern-day Santorini, a trading outpost about 70 miles from Crete that was destroyed by a volcanic eruption that occurred between 1600 and 1525 BCE.‡ Either all the inhabitants of Thera escaped before the volcano erupted (though if they did, it's likely that they were subsequently drowned at sea by a tidal wave) or their bodies are still to be uncovered.

- Nonetheless, the Therans have left us wonderful evidence of the high artistic accomplishment of this age in the form of frescoes, almost perfectly preserved because they were mantled in ash. And these conclusively reveal that Thera was firmly within the Minoan cultural orbit.

- The volcanic eruption on Thera and the ensuing tidal wave have been blamed for the decline of Minoan palace culture, not to mention the parting of the Red Sea, as described in Exodus. But although the tidal wave may have damaged Minoan civilization economically by disrupting trade, the tidal wave wasn't responsible for the decline of the civilization—at least not directly, as it's far too early for that.

## Mycenaean Civilization

- Minoan civilization didn't start to decline until 1450, when it came into the orbit of a new culture, known as Mycenaean, which arose on the Greek mainland. Mycenaean civilization flourished from 1600 to 1050 BCE. The Mycenaeans were indisputably Greek, as we know from their writing.

‡ The date is arrived at by dendrochronology: the science of dating tree rings to the exact year they were formed.

- Important Mycenaean sites have been discovered at Tiryns, Thebes, and Pylos as well as at Mycenae, the principal site. Unlike the palace at Cnossus, Mycenae is completely unreconstructed—and all the more powerful for it. The first thing you see when you arrive are the breathtaking great walls, made of giant unworked conglomerate blocks. Later Greeks thought they must have been built by the giant Cyclopes—hence the term *Cyclopean*, which is applied to these walls to this day.

- As you enter the city, you pass through the famous Lion Gateway, dated to the middle of the 13th century BCE, so called because of two carved lions standing on either side of a single column in a heraldic pose. Their faces are missing and may well have been made of gold plate. It's the lone example of monumental sculpture to have survived from the Mycenaean world.

- The most impressive artifacts that this civilization has yielded are gold objects and weapons, all from Mycenae. Most are associated with burials in Grave Circle B, which is dated to 1600. The burials were at the bottom of shafts that were some seven feet (two and a half meters) deep and cut into the rock with a chamber at the base that was large enough in some cases to accommodate several burials.

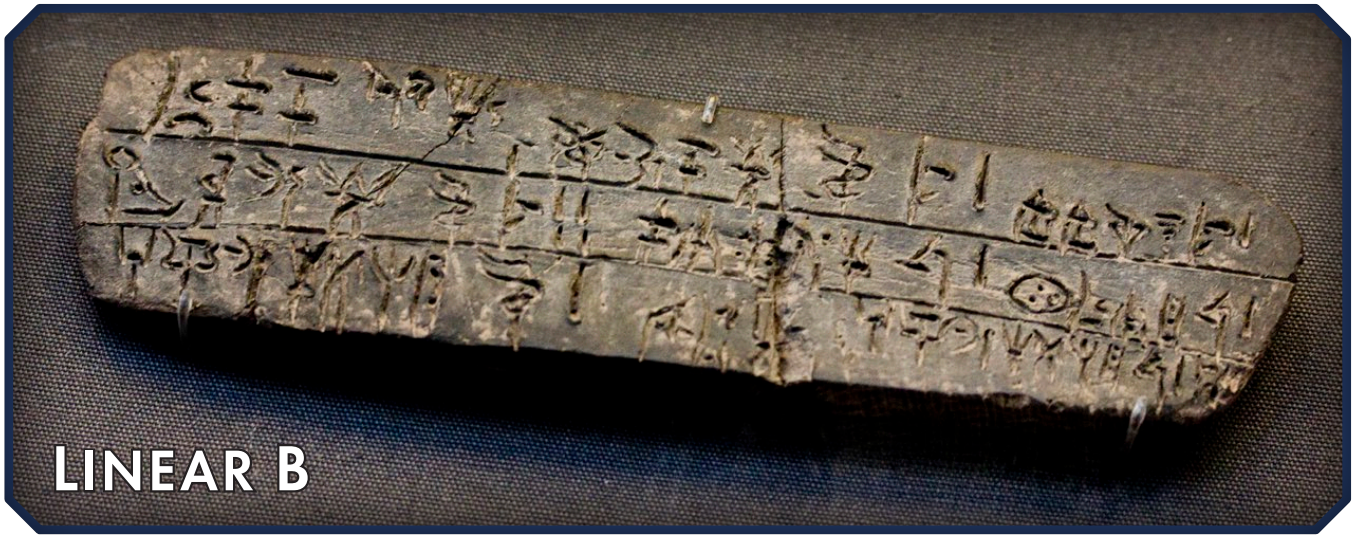
- More than 30 pounds of sheet gold have been found in these shaft graves, testifying to Homer's description in the *Iliad* of Mycenae as "rich in gold." Much of it was placed directly on the body. There are masks of the dead made of thin sheets of gold, diadems, earrings, necklaces, coverings for the breast, and rosettes. There are also drinking cups, notably the Cup of Nestor, so named because it resembles Homer's description of the cup used by the mythological Nestor in the 11th book of the *Iliad*.

- In addition, there are dozens of spears, swords, and six daggers decorated with gold, silver, and a black enamel called niello. The graves also included imported materials from Egypt, North Africa, Afghanistan, and England, indicating that the Mycenaeans had trading contacts far abroad. The finds are housed in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.

- Remarkable as well are the tholos tombs—also known as beehive tombs because of their distinctive shape—which were cut into the hillside. No burials or funerary gifts or evidence of the ceremony that was performed on behalf of the dead have been found in any of the beehive tombs at Mycenae. All, it seems, were robbed. We know of more than 100 in total throughout the entire Mycenaean-dominated world. They were the largest single-span buildings in existence until the Pantheon in Rome in the 2nd century CE.

- The Mycenaean palaces have also yielded evidence of the writing script Linear B dating from 1450 onward. Linear B provides us with the best evidence for cultural continuity from the Mycenaean period into the succeeding Dark Age, and then into the Geometric period, through the names of deities—Hera, Poseidon, Athena, and Dionysus—that appear in the texts.

- Linear B is preserved on clay tablets that were inscribed with a sharp instrument in a cuneiform§ script. It was deciphered by an English architect named Michael Ventris in 1952. The texts that are preserved on the tablets are administrative accounts, not literature. This reveals that the Mycenaean world was very bureaucratic in that it liked to keep records of numbers of sheep, goats, wine, crops, etc.




- Mycenaean civilization was the discovery of a wealthy German entrepreneur named Heinrich Schliemann, who was obsessed with proving that the Trojan War—the war fought between the Greeks and the Trojans—really did take place. Schliemann discovered the site of what he believed to be Troy¶ (or Ilion, to give it its Greek name) in 1873, and later he excavated at Mycenae in 1876.

§ *Cuneiform* means "in the form of a wedge," a reference to the wedge-shaped characters that were impressed onto the clay tablets.

¶ Heinrich Schliemann identified Troy with a site called Hissarlik about four miles from the Aegean coast. Hissarlik was occupied from 3000 to 1200 BCE. It's certainly in the right place, but the problem is that there are multiple layers—meaning multiple cities—heaped on top of each other, and we can't be certain which one is the Troy of Homer's poem.

- The actuality of the Trojan War remains a point of contention between scholars to this day, though most believe that it did take place. Most believe that the war occurred sometime between 1250 and 1225 BCE but that it wasn't on the scale imagined by Homer—who claimed that it lasted 10 years—and that the cause of the war wasn't the abduction of Menelaus's wife Helen by the Trojan prince Paris.

- Instead, the theory is that it was due to the fact that the Mycenaeans needed access to the Black Sea region through the strait known as the Dardanelles (what the Greeks called the Hellespont), whose entrance was controlled by the Trojans, who were taxing the Mycenaeans. This conflict may have ended in the demise of both Troy and Mycenae, since so much effort was expended by both.

- Around 1250, the Mycenaean palaces began strengthening their defenses, suggesting anxiety in the face of some imminent attack. Then, sometime between 1200 and 1100 BCE, Mycenaean civilization began to collapse. Archaeologists detect looting and burning at all the Mycenaean palaces. By 1100, Mycenae was no more than a village, ending a period of steady decline that lasted a century or more.

- There's no scholarly consensus on what caused the collapse of Mycenaean civilization, but it's clear that there was a general breakdown in centralized power around 1200 in the Middle East, evidenced by the dissolution of the Hittite empire and a weakening of Egypt. Whatever the cause, by 1050 BCE, we enter into what is known as the Dark Age.

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LECTURE 3

# Dark Age and Archaic Greece

Greek history from the eclipse of Mycenaean civilization to the death of Alexander the Great generally gets divided into three big chunks: the Dark Age, the Archaic* period, and the Classical† period. These are evaluative terms that inevitably suggest a kind of cultural ascent, from the primitive to the sophisticated, and perhaps that's right to some extent. Problematically, however, it suggests that Greece attained its height of perfection in a certain period and that everything before was somewhat rudimentary and that everything after represented decline. But this is a view of Greek history that shouldn't be endorsed.

* *Archaic* comes from the Greek adjective *archaios*, which means "old-fashioned."

† *Classical* means "exemplary" or "timeless." It comes from the Latin word *classis*, which means "class," but often with the sense of "first class."

# The Dark Age

- The Dark Age is prehistory, the period before any written records. Broadly, the term refers to the period from 1100 to 750, and 1100 was within the period when things started going seriously wrong for the Mycenaeans. There were no palaces or sculptures; in fact, there was little art of any kind. Trade was very restricted, and there was no centralized power. Linear B writing died out, and the population was drastically reduced, perhaps by as much as 90 percent, according to some estimates.

- Life, to put it bluntly, was pretty miserable. We don't know what caused this sad state of affairs—whether it was the arrival of intruders from the outside or whether it collapsed from within. However, it isn't as if civilization disappeared altogether. The Greeks weren't living back in the Stone Age.

- A big question, however, has to do with the extent of cultural continuity. The best evidence in support of continuity is the appearance in Linear B tablets of the names of Greek divinities that are known in historical times. They include Zeus, the most powerful god; his wife Hera; Dionysus, god of wine; Poseidon, god of the sea; Ares, god of war; and Artemis, goddess of the hunt. A noticeable absentee is Aphrodite, goddess of love. But while this is interesting, it relates only to religion, so it's hardly conclusive, and we have no other evidence of cultural continuity from Mycenaean times.

- Moreover, the period from 1100 to 750 is not without accomplishment. For one thing, iron technology gets introduced into Greece, possibly from the island of Cyprus. Iron technology had been known in the East for centuries, but the Mycenaeans had imported tin and copper to make bronze. They don't seem to have cared much for iron because they didn't use it for fashioning choice artifacts, probably on aesthetic grounds. Iron doesn't shine like bronze, and it's clunky by comparison.

- But now that trade was greatly reduced, the Greeks were forced to smelt iron, since iron ore was readily available in the Argolid, in the northeast Peloponnese; in Attica, the territory surrounding; and on the island of Euboea. As a result, iron started to replace bronze as the more popular metal for everyday objects.

- In the 10th century, conditions slowly started to improve on the Greek mainland. The population increased, and there's evidence of limited trade, though the material record—artifacts, buildings, etc.—remains very limited. But as the population increased, Greeks living on the mainland started moving eastward across the Aegean and establishing settlements on the modern-day Turkish coast and the islands lying offshore. This is called the Ionian migration because the region they settled in was known as Ionia. It was Athens that took the lead in this migration.

- Even so, there are few settlements that date to the Dark Age period, and those that do seem not to have been occupied for long. This was perhaps due to demographic decline. There is evidence that only half of the 220 sites that are attested for the period from 1200 to 1150 BCE were still being occupied a century later.

- It used to be believed that the Dark Age didn't produce any architecture worthy of the name, but in 1964, the remains of a spectacular building dating to the 10th century came to light at a coastal village known today as Lefkandi on Euboea, the island that lies off the northeast coast of Attica. The building is many times larger than any other known structure of contemporary date. It has therefore caused scholars to revise their view of the Dark Age period.

- The most important invention of this period was the alphabet. Writing had been around for millennia: Both the Sumerians and the Egyptians were familiar with it well before 3000 BCE, more than 2,000 years earlier. Three scripts were used in Bronze Age Greece in the 2nd millennium BCE: Linear A and Cretan hieroglyphics (neither of which has been deciphered) and the later Linear B (which has been deciphered).

- The invention of the Greek alphabet occurred around 800 BCE as a result of contact with the Phoenicians, a Semitic seafaring people whose heartland was the coast of modern-day Israel, Lebanon, and southern Syria. The names of many of the letters that the Greeks invented have Phoenician names, such as *alpha* from *aleph*, meaning "ox."

- The 22 characters of the Phoenician alphabet didn't have any characters to represent vowel sounds, so the Greeks used some of the Phoenician characters to stand for vowels. This was a revolutionary step because it made the Greek alphabet much more flexible than the Phoenician one.

- The invention of the Greek alphabet made it possible to collaborate over distance in a wholly new way. It meant that administrative and historical records could be kept and that literature could be written down and preserved. The invention of the alphabet is also the reason why we know that the first year in which the Olympic Games‡ were held in Greece was 776 BCE.

‡ We have an almost-continuous list of winners in the running race over the distance of one stade (about 600 feet) from the first Olympiad in 776 BCE to the last, the 262nd Olympiad, in 269 CE.

**The Olympic Games—an institution that has lasted more than a thousand years—were a great cultural achievement of the Greeks of the Late Dark Age.**

- Another consequence of the invention of writing is that the Athenians began keeping a list of archons, or magistrates—the so-called eponymous archon, after whom each year was named. The archon list begins in 682 BCE.

- We don't know whether the Greeks understood first the utilitarian potential of writing for administrative purposes or the communicative potential of writing (its ability to encode continuous speech), although the two are obviously related.

- The first examples of writing that have come to us record scraps of epic poetry. It isn't until much later that we have evidence of the alphabet being used for commercial purposes.

- One of the most important consequences of the invention of the alphabet was that laws could now be written down. The earliest evidence for law codes dates to around 600 BCE. This helped bring about the breakdown of aristocratic privilege. Since laws were now codified, aristocrats could no longer punish at will.

- Another important consequence was that poetry, which previously had been passed down through recitation, could now be preserved on papyrus, the chief writing material. And that, in turn, gave rise to prose. Whereas long chunks of poetry can be memorized, prose needs to be written down.

- Writing set Greece on a revolutionary path that would lead some poleis toward democracy, because you can't have a functioning democracy unless there's a method of communicating with a large number of people. Thus, literacy was connected with—and to some extent responsible for—many of the most important changes in both the Dark Age and its successor, the Archaic Age, including democracy.

# THE ARCHAIC AGE

- The Archaic age begins in about 750, about a generation before Homer began composing, although the society he describes has features that are perhaps as recent as 800 BCE. In this way, Homer provides us with a window into the recent past—into Late Dark Age society. And through that window, we see that the social and political structures of later Greek society were already lining up.

- The distinctive family unit, the *oikos*, and the distinctive political setup, the polis,§ or city-state, was already in place. Rule was in the hands of an aristocracy, but democracy was already in the pipeline, with assemblies and councils in place.

> The Great Course *Athenian Democracy: An Experiment for the Ages* discusses several places in Homer where democratic assemblies and councils occur.

- The poems of Homer kept alive the memory of the Late Bronze Age by describing a period of great material prosperity and military power that had long since passed. And that was a great gift to the Greeks of later times.

- The 150-year period from 730 to 580 saw an enormous expansion of Greek civilization through colonization. The Greeks, largely because the mainland was no longer able to support a growing population, began establishing settlements throughout the eastern Mediterranean but also in eastern Sicily and southern Italy, on the southern shore of France, on the eastern coast of Spain, and on the southern shore of the Black Sea.

- One of the consequences of this expansion was that the social divisions between aristocrats and commoners eroded, since all the settlers were in the same situation. It was largely because of this movement that the Greeks came into contact with foreign cultures. The influence of these foreign

§ We can't pinpoint the date that the polis first emerged, but it's evident that Homer understood the concept.

cultures was so profound that historians have dubbed the century from 725 to 625 as the Orientalizing period. By the time the movement had come to an end, the number of Greek poleis had approximately doubled.

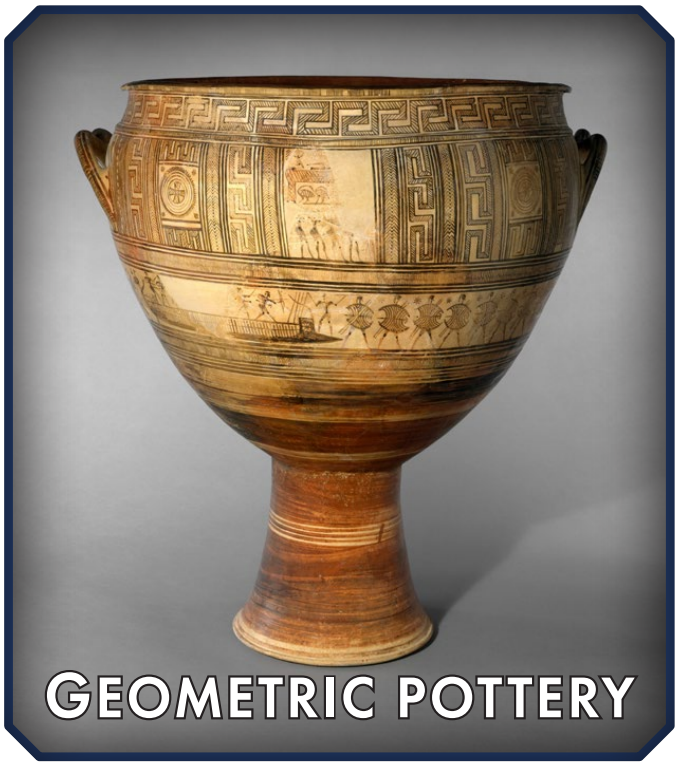
- The form in which a settlement was established abroad was as a polis, which is a community that has its own laws, constitution, army, and social structure. There were more than 1,035 poleis in the Greek world of varying size and importance. The two most important and powerful poleis were Athens and Sparta, and they would eventually engage in a life-or-death struggle we call the Peloponnesian War.

- A polis was by definition an autonomous unit, and that autonomy depended on and was guaranteed by its military, which comprised the entire citizen body. Those who could afford armor served as hoplites,¶ who wore bronze armor and carried round, wooden shields covered in bronze.

- Hoplite fighting took place between soldiers arranged in phalanxes, or rectangles several ranks deep. Victory depended on every citizen standing his ground because hoplites stood shoulder to shoulder. If a hoplite lost his nerve, this threatened the whole line, because his shield protected the man standing on his left. So this style of fighting promoted camaraderie and civic identity. It was also very egalitarian, as the rich and the poor fought alongside each other.

- Another important innovation of the Archaic period was coinage. Coins were introduced into the Greek world around 600 BCE, probably from Lydia in Turkey. They were originally minted by the aristocracy as a way of advertising their prestige. Ultimately, however, coinage undermined their power by permitting nonaristocrats, whose wealth was founded not on land but on commerce, to make a fortune. Members of the demos, or the common people, could now vie with each other in commercial activities because the aristocracy largely turned its back on entrepreneurship of all kinds. In the eyes of Greek aristocrats, a gentleman didn't dirty his hands with making money, preferring wealth that derived from land ownership.

¶ The name *hoplitês* means "one who carries a *hoplon*," or a round shield.




- Yet another achievement of the Archaic Age is painted pottery, whose origins lie in the preceding Dark Age. The pottery that was produced around 750 is an art form of extraordinary precision both in shape and line. It's called Geometric because the painted decoration was based on simple geometric shapes. Athens was the producer of the best pottery of this period.

- With the invention of coinage, the spread of literacy, settlement abroad, the emergence of democracy, and the establishment of law codes, the aristocracy took a pretty heavy hit. But it by no means did them in completely. Indeed, aristocrats like Pericles and Alcibiades were still dominating the Athenian Assembly until the end of the 5th century BCE.

- An indication of divisions within the ranks of the aristocracy is evident in the fact that from 650 to 525 BCE a number of Greek states were ruled by tyrants. The typical tyrant was a disgruntled aristocrat who had a grudge against his fellow aristocrats and who courted the support of commoners to seize power.

- Tyrants gained a bad reputation in later times, but the historical record suggests that they weren't all bad. In some places, such as Athens, they served as an important catalyst at the point of transition from aristocratic to popular rule.

- Athens's steady march toward democracy began in the 6th century with Solon, the so-called father of democracy. It continued under Cleisthenes, who introduced major reforms in the final decade of the 6th century. What motivated the Athenians to take the final step was their defeat of the

Persians at the Battle of Marathon.** If they hadn't won that battle, the Persians would've burned Athens to the ground. And Marathon gave vigor and confidence to Athenian democracy, still in its infancy.

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** Legend has it that after Athens's victory, a runner named Philippides ran with news of the victory from Marathon to Athens—a distance of about 26 miles—whereupon he expired on the spot. And we commemorate that run by a race of that length.

LECTURE 4

# Classical Greece: The Age of Pericles

The Classical period of Greek history was an amazing period of human accomplishment,* virtually unlike any other. This period lasted about 150 years, from 480 to 323 BCE. It began when the Greeks stopped the Persian invasion under Xerxes and radical democracy was established in Athens, and it ended when Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, died in Babylon at the age of 32, having totally transformed the world.

* Athens predominated in the achievements of the Classical era, and the spirit of Athens influenced other communities, but large parts of the Greek-speaking world were unaffected by these achievements, and one at least—Sparta—adamantly turned its back on them.

# The Defeat of the Persians

- The Classical period can be divided into three blocks. The first one covers the 50-year period from the defeat of the Persians in 480 to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, from 480 to 431. The Persian invasion under King Xerxes had all but succeeded; Herodotus, the historian who covered it, made that abundantly clear.

- The Greek states on the mainland formed a loose coalition, but they were divided from the outset and only just hung together. Some Greek states even went over to the Persian side, notably Thebes. The final defeat of the Persians at Plataea in 479 left the Greeks triumphant but by no means completely out of the woods.

- Persia was still a force to be reckoned with—it remained the only superpower. So the Greeks formed an alliance to ward off further attack. Sparta could have been the leader of this alliance, since it was the major military power, but this would have involved campaigning overseas, something the Spartans were very reluctant to do, haunted as they always were by fear of a helot revolt at home. Helots were the enslaved population of Messenia, the territory to the west of Sparta.

- So Sparta declined the position, and in 478, it fell to the Athenians to assume the leadership of a maritime alliance called the Delian† League or Delian Confederacy. Each state, including Athens, exercised one vote, irrespective of its size. That's admirably democratic in theory. In practice, however, it meant that Athens could dominate the council by applying pressure on the smaller states in the form of bullying, cajoling, and bribing.

- Herodotus brings his history to an end in 479, and for the next 50 years, we have no detailed historical account. Thucydides provides a summary of the period until just before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, which is his main theme. He includes this summary because he believed that

† This was so named because it had a common treasury located in the Cyclades on the island of Delos, where the council of the league also met.

the genesis of the war could be traced back to events that occurred in that half century, which saw Athens's power, wealth, and outreach dramatically increasing.

- We also have lots of inscriptions from this period that enable us to fill in a few of the many gaps in our knowledge, since with the introduction of radical democracy, the Athenians began recording all of their deliberative decisions on stone. From the start, Athens was not only the leader of the Delian League but also the major player in its organization.

- About 150 Greek states signed up. Initially, they were all expected to contribute ships to a common fleet. However, the smaller ones were permitted to pay tribute instead, and over time, more and more states took this soft option, until only Athens and three of the large islands off the coast of modern-day Turkey (Lesbos, Chios, and Samos) were still contributing ships.

- A watershed moment occurred in 471, when the Cycladic island of Naxos tried to secede and was forced back into membership. Six years later, Thasos, an island off the coast of northern Greece, revolted and appealed to the Spartans. The Spartans promised to help but were prevented by an earthquake, followed by a major revolt among the helots.

- There is a profound paradox to all of this. While Athens was tightening its hold over its so-called allies, it was moving full steam ahead toward radical democracy. Indeed, there's a good case for arguing that if Athens hadn't converted the Delian League into what was in effect an empire, radical democracy could not have functioned.

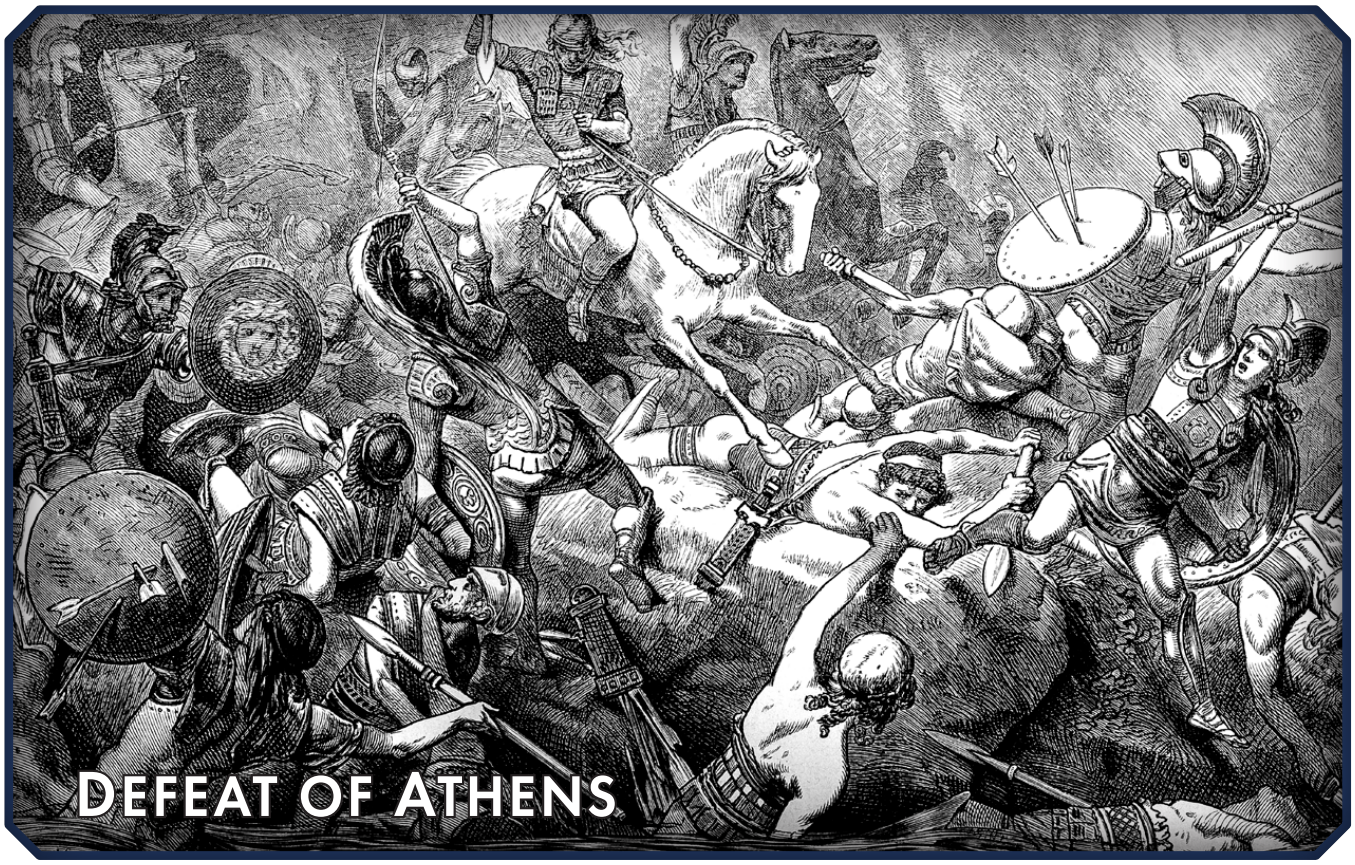
- That's because it was the tribute received annually from the so-called allies that enabled the Athenian citizenry to receive payment for performing their civic duties, such as serving on the jury. In other words, it was the tribute that funded the democracy. Over the course of this half century, the spectacular rise in Athens's fortunes engendered increasing fear among the Spartans and their allies, and in 431, it led to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

- In Thucydides's *History*, he makes a sophisticated distinction between what he regards as the ultimate cause of the war—Sparta's fear of Athens's increasing greatness—and the immediate causes, a series of provocations that led the two sides further down the path toward war.

## The Peloponnesian War

- The Peloponnesian War, which is the second block of time within the Classical period, was to prove an unmitigated disaster for the whole Greek world. It ended in 404 with the defeat of Athens. It's called the Peloponnesian War because Sparta was supported in its bid to contain Athens by its allies, most of whom resided in the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece.

- Thucydides emphasizes the brutalizing effect of protracted hostilities on any society. No fan of democracy, he also makes clear the inadequacy of such a governance system for running a war.


DEFEAT OF ATHENS

- Pericles, who dominated the Athenian Assembly at the outbreak of the war, believed that Athens was unbeatable as long as it maintained control of the Aegean Sea and didn't engage the Spartans by land. And in fact, as Pericles predicted, the initial moves produced a stalemate.

- Things got interesting when the Athenian general Demosthenes won land victories and the Spartan commander Brasidas caused disaffection among Athens's allies. In other words, the two sides reversed their traditional roles, with Athens, a naval power, trusting its army, and Sparta, fearful of foreign adventures, taking the fight abroad.

- There were also, as in every war, gross miscalculations, notably Athens's attempt to conquer Sicily, which led to the destruction of Athens's entire expeditionary force in 413. But even after this devastating defeat, Athens soldiered on for nearly nine years, an achievement of the democracy for which even Thucydides gives full credit. The 27-year war—there was an uneasy peace after a decade of hostilities that lasted four years—finally ended in 404.‡

## The Death of Alexander the Great

- The third block in the Classical period is the 80 years from the end of the 5th century to 323 BCE, the death of Alexander the Great.

- Athens's defeat in the Peloponnesian War led to the suspension of its democracy. It was replaced by the rule of an aristocratic body known as the Thirty Tyrants. This was somewhat similar to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. The Thirty exiled or executed thousands of Athenians either because of personal enmity or to seize their wealth.

‡ It wasn't until March 1996, nearly 2,500 years after Athens had surrendered, that the mayors of Athens and Sparta finally buried the hatchet and signed a 200-word document pledging "unbreakable bonds."

- The Thirty had the backing of Sparta and were committed to reinstalling what they called "the ancestral constitution"—that is, they wanted to put the clock back 100 years or more and reintroduce a constitution that was more aristocratic. It all fell apart after eight months, however.

- Those committed to radical democracy—by far the majority—took up arms and defeated the Thirty and their supporters. They then declared an amnesty for all but the Thirty and their henchmen and invited all the exiles to return. The restored democracy behaved with exemplary restraint.

- Their supporters did, however, hold a show trial of one high-profile intellectual to demonstrate that there was no going back. In 399, Socrates was brought to trial and executed, in part for his involvement with members of the Thirty and his known hostility toward democracy.

- When the Athenians capitulated to the Peloponnesians in 404 and before the Thirty assumed power, Sparta's allies clamored for Athens's destruction. The Spartans demurred, however. According to Xenophon—an Athenian mercenary officer and friend of Socrates who is our principal historical source for this period—Sparta declined to destroy a city that had done so much for Greece. More plausibly, they didn't want to destroy a city that would act as a counterweight to their most powerful allies, Thebes and Corinth, whose allegiance they didn't trust.

- Instead, the Spartans decided that Athens's fortifications should be destroyed and that its navy should be reduced to a mere 12 ships. The Spartan general Lysander, who supervised the destruction of the walls, did so, Xenophon recounts, "in the belief that this day meant the beginning of freedom for Greece."

- It didn't, of course. In fact, it solved nothing. Within 10 years, the principal belligerents were all at each other's throats again, though this time the lineup was different. It was Thebes, Corinth, and Athens against Sparta.

- The dualism that had dominated the Greek world between Athens and Sparta in the 5th century, however, was at an end. First Sparta and then Athens become prominent in the 4th century. For a brief period, Athens even built up a second naval confederacy, but it was only a shadow of its predecessor, since the Athenians were careful not to alarm their allies by ruling unilaterally.

- But the old antagonism between Athens and Sparta no longer existed, and a shifting pattern of temporary alliances resulted as the Greek states kept hustling to prevent any one of their number from achieving supremacy. And then along came Macedon, seemingly out of nowhere.

> Sparta was the antithesis of Athens. Whereas Athens was forward-looking, Sparta was deeply conservative. Whereas Athens's economy was dominated by commercial enterprise, Sparta was agricultural and self-sufficient. Whereas Athens was a naval power, Sparta was a military power.

- Something strange happened in the north of Greece in 359, consequent upon the accession of Philip II. Macedonia, the region in northeast Greece that had been a cultural and political backwater up to then, suddenly began to emerge as a world power.

- To what extent this was due to the personality of Philip and due to developments within Macedonian society independent of Philip is impossible to say, but it was under Philip that Macedonia, almost overnight, became a powerful military state able to dominate the Greek mainland as no other state had been able to do before. This was due to a set of circumstances that are hidden from us because we have no literary sources from Macedonia itself, so we only see it from the outside, from Athenian writers.

- Philip achieved his goal of dominating the entire Greek mainland by diplomacy, duplicity, and military strategy. The greatest challenge to his rise came from the Athenian politician and orator Demosthenes, who cajoled and harangued his compatriots and other Greeks to resist Philip

before he became unstoppable. Demosthenes eventually succeeded in building a coalition against Philip, notably allied to Thebes, and a decisive battle took place at Chaeronea in central Greece in August 338.

- Philip won a conclusive victory, and the Greeks lost their freedom, which they never regained. However, they continued to squabble among themselves for many centuries to come. In 336, Philip was murdered—just as he was getting ready to take on the Persian empire.

- We don't know exactly why Philip planned to go east, but perhaps it was his intention to avenge Greece for Xerxes's invasion a century and a half earlier. Even if that wasn't his motive, it was a convenient banner to march under, since every Greek could identify with it.

- Philip was succeeded by his son Alexander, who moved quickly to assume the reins of power and did everything that his father had planned and more. He spent two years securing his northern frontiers and suppressing a revolt by Thebes, leveling it to the ground. Then, he crossed over into modern-day Turkey to do what his father had planned.

- The colossal scale of the enterprise Alexander undertook is scarcely imaginable. Very few people living in Greece at the time could have seriously believed that the Persian empire was on its last legs.

**On one level, the Classical period is very much like any other epoch in history, being subject to wars, political upheavals, instability, killing on a massive scale, and great movements of peoples.**

**However, during this period, there were achievements in almost every branch of science, including medicine, as well as in painting, sculpture, pottery, architecture, philosophy, the writing of history, drama, politics, and oratory.**

- The Classical period came to an end with the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon after a fever, exacerbated by prolonged drinking. His conquests had given birth to a new culture and to a new world—the world we call Hellenistic. He therefore endowed Greek culture with a scope and opportunity the Greeks had never previously possessed.

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LECTURE 5

# Alexander the Great: Greek Culture Spreads

The Hellenistic period began with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 and ended in 30 BCE, when the Romans finally conquered Egypt. After Philip II was assassinated, Alexander led his army into Asia, and as a result, the world changed: It became *Hellenistic*, meaning "under the influence of Hellenic or Greek culture." In other words, thanks to Alexander the Great of Macedonia, the whole former Persian empire and territory far beyond it came under the influence of Greek civilization for the first time.

# Changing the World

- The Persian empire covered at least a million square miles, and estimates of its population are anywhere between 17 and 35 million. Fortunately, these figures were unknown to Alexander, or he might have thought twice before setting out—or not, being Alexander the Great. But he certainly wouldn't have revealed the size of the task ahead to his army.

- And what was the objective? We don't know. To defeat the Persian king Darius III and leave things at that? No, because Alexander endeavored to reach "the ends of the world and the outer sea," hence his campaign into India, which almost broke the back of his army. Alexander had an incredible and inexhaustible appetite for the world and exotic, faraway places, and that in part seems to have been what motivated him to conquer the Persian empire.

- More than half a century ago, interpretations of Alexander the Great were still largely based on the highly idealistic interpretation of the Scottish ancient historian Sir William Woodthorpe Tarn, more popularly known as W. W. Tarn, who wrote a two-volume biography of Alexander and an influential chapter in the magisterial *Cambridge Ancient History*. He presents Alexander as "one of the supreme fertilizing forces of history" who had a vision of the unity of humankind.

- The ancient historian Jeanne Reames, who has also written extensively on Alexander, amusingly accused Tarn of turning him into "a proper Scottish gentleman," just like himself. Tarn was particularly troubled by what he saw as false charges of homoeroticism laid against Alexander in ancient sources, which he characterized as "defamations."

- What we can agree about, unequivocally, is that Alexander was a highly cultivated man who contributed like no one before or after him to the spread of a certain set of values rooted in Hellenic culture throughout the ancient world. Deliberately or unintentionally—consciously or unconsciously—therefore, Alexander did indeed change the world.

- However, it's fanciful to suggest that he made it his mission to introduce Greek culture to those benighted people out East, as Tarn saw them, who had never set eyes on a Greek sculpture and had never heard any Greek spoken. It's true that Alexander was highly educated—Aristotle was his tutor—but it's doubtful that he saw himself as an emissary of Hellenic culture. He was a warrior first and foremost, and a rather good one at that. The Hellenization part seems to have taken place almost of its own accord.

- It's convention for ancient historians to tell the story of Alexander's conquests through Greek eyes because the only sources we have for his reign are Greek. But we need to give credit to the peoples he conquered, who embraced, without any imposition, the culture that he and his Panhellenic army* represented.

- The peoples Alexander conquered, apart from the Persians, were the inhabitants of modern-day Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan, Israel, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, and India. Alexander didn't bring the total landmass of all of these countries under his control, but he impacted a fairly large slice of each.

**It wasn't the case that Greek civilization spread throughout the length and breadth of Alexander's former empire; rather, it took very vigorous root in pockets of that great expanse of land.**

* It wasn't exclusively an army of Macedonian soldiers, though they constituted the elite. It also included mercenaries from Athens, Corinth, Thebes, and elsewhere.

- Alexander the Great is hardly an unambiguous example of humanity (his bloodlust, outbursts of rage, and alcoholism are particularly to be regretted), but his leadership is unparalleled in the annals of Greek history, and perhaps any history. In large part, it must be his extraordinary charisma that bound others to him—not only Greeks but also those of other races, notably the Persians, whom he conquered and whose culture he admired. He won battles he should have lost and got his men to follow him unquestioningly when they had precious little to gain by it, simply because their faith in him was unshakeable.†

- During the Hellenistic period, the ancient world changed in several practical ways. Money spread to areas that previously had relied on barter. There was greater specialization. Commerce was established on a more international basis. The Aegean islands of Delos and Rhodes, as well as the city of Pergamum, situated a few miles from the west coast of modern-day Turkey, became extremely important and prosperous trading centers.

- In other ways, however, the Hellenistic world wasn't much different from its Classical predecessor. Businesses and landholdings tended to remain small, run by the owner and a handful of slaves. There was nothing akin to mass production. The iron plough was introduced for agriculture and Archimedes' screw for irrigation, but these had only a limited impact. There was also, at times, severe economic distress, notably in mainland Greece and the islands of the Aegean.

† Alexander traced his descent from Heracles, the ancestor of the Macedonian royal house. This is why coins of Alexander show him wearing the skin of the Nemean lion, which Heracles had slain as one of his 12 labors.

# Conquering the Persian Empire

- Alexander the Great defeated the Persian king Darius III at the Battle of Issus‡ in November 333. This was the first battle in which Alexander and Darius faced each other. Darius hadn't shown up for the first battle that Alexander fought on Persian soil, the Battle of Granicus. Darius thought that his generals could take care of things. But he was wrong. After his defeat at Issus, Darius fled.

- Darius regrouped and faced Alexander for a second time at the Battle of Guagamela in Iraqi Kurdistan in 331. Alexander was heavily outnumbered, by more than two to one by modern estimates, but he won a decisive victory, as a result of which the Persian empire fell into his hands.

- How did he manage to win against such odds? Confidence in his own invincibility must have had a lot to do with it—and so did the facts that his army was extremely disciplined and that he was a risk-taker. There were occasions when the enemy had the upper hand that Alexander feinted retreat and lured them into a trap.

‡ This battle is the subject of a famous mosaic that was found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii and thought to be a copy of a Hellenistic painting. It's an incredibly accomplished work that provides marvelous evidence of the quality of lost Hellenistic painting.

- Darius was eventually assassinated by one of his satraps, or provincial governors—in fact, a cousin of his named Bessus. Alexander was saddened to learn of Darius's shameful death and awarded the king a magnificent burial. He also married one of Darius's daughters, partly as a way to show his respect for Persian royalty, Persian culture, and Persian identity, an attitude he demonstrated consistently.

## The Spread of Greek Culture

- When Alexander died in Babylon at the age of 32, after a reign that had lasted 12 years and eight months, he left an empire stretching from the Adriatic Sea in the west to the Punjab in the east. Much of it was held together very loosely, and parts of it had never come under Macedonian control at all. There were undoubtedly numerous pockets in this vast tract of land that had never heard of his name, as news, even important news, would not have penetrated the most rural districts.

- Alexander is often faulted for not taking steps to solidify and unify his conquests. His most important initiative was to establish new cities, or at least settlements, organized on Greek lines in parts of the world that had never known Greek culture before, of which the most important was Alexandria§ in Egypt.

- People talk rather loosely of the "empire" of Alexander the Great, but it wasn't an empire in the traditionally accepted sense of the word, and it fragmented on his demise, when his "successors" took over and carved up his empire. The term *successors* describes Alexander's generals, who struggled among themselves to grab as much of his empire as each could.

§ Founded in 332/331 by Alexander, the city of Alexandria dominated the Hellenistic world and did more than any other city to preserve and transmit Greek culture, not least because of its prime location as a center of maritime commerce at the western tip of the Nile River delta.

- Alexander did not appoint an heir, so when he died, a council was held at Babylon supposedly to solve the situation. It was decided to appoint his half brother, Philip Arrhidaeus, who was simple-minded, and his son Alexander, who was an infant, as coheirs to the empire as Philip III and Alexander IV. They were an unlikely pair, to put it mildly, and from the start, they were mere pawns in the struggle for power.

- The struggle for possession of Alexander's erstwhile empire lasted for nearly half a century to 275 BCE, when three stable kingdoms finally took root, each with its own royal family: Macedonia under the Antigonids, southern Turkey and Syria under the Seleucids, and Egypt under the Ptolemies. All three were named for Alexander's generals: Antigonus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.

- As a result, kingship became the system of government under which all Greeks and all peoples subject to the Greeks live in the Hellenistic world. However, kingship at root didn't mean ruling over a demarcated region or land; rather, it was a distinct honor accorded to an individual who controlled—often in some vague way but by virtue of military achievement—peoples or cities. In other words, kings imposed themselves on their subjects from above, apart from the Ptolemies, who inserted themselves into the political and religious structures of Egypt that already supported kingship.

- The inception of the Hellenistic world sounded the political death knell of the Greek city-state. The polis continued to exist, but it was no longer self-governing in the way that it had been. In 314, Antigonus issued an edict declaring that the Greeks were to be "free, without garrisons, and self-governing," according to the historian Diodorus Siculus. But that was a lie. The Greek states were never to be free again. They would be ruled first by the Macedonians, then by the Romans, then by the Byzantines, and then by the Ottoman Turks, up until the 19th century.

- But no one ever told them that they had lost their freedom for good, and they continued to squabble among themselves—at least until the Romans arrived. And though the polis wasn't what it had been as an independent political entity, it took root from the mid-3rd century onward in places where it had never existed before.

- The spread of Greek culture throughout the eastern Mediterranean was for the most part a peaceful infiltration. It did not obliterate local traditions but peacefully coexisted with them. The one culture it did clash with was Judaism, largely because of the incompatibility of a monotheistic system of belief with a polytheistic system of belief. It was also the case that Hellenism made more inroads into the urbanized centers than it did into rural areas.

- One of the principal ways in which Hellenization took root was through the spread of the Greek language. The dialect wasn't Athenian or Ionic or Doric or Aeolic. It was a unified dialect called Koine, which is short for *koinê dialektos*, meaning "common language." In other words, it became the lingua franca of the Hellenistic world.¶

- Koine also fostered the growth of a feeling of internationalism, or globalism, which was a distinct feature of the Hellenistic world. The Hellenistic world was not, however, a world where brotherly love prevailed. There was a sharp social division generally between all Greeks and indigenous populations.

**The spread of the Greek tongue in a form that was recognizable throughout the Middle East and beyond was a powerful conduit for the spread of Greek ideas.**

## READINGS

Errington, *A History of the Hellenistic World.*

Green, *Alexander to Actium.*

Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander.*

Walbank, *The Hellenistic World.*

¶ This is why the Gospels were written in Koine Greek.

LECTURE 6

# Greece, Rome, Byzantium, and Baghdad

Greek culture provided the foundation and springboard for Roman accomplishment in both the arts and sciences. The Romans not only adapted what they borrowed from the Greeks but also preserved it. We're largely dependent on the Romans for our knowledge of ancient Greece.

# Greece and Rome

- Rome first came into contact with Greece indirectly through the Etruscans, neighbors of the Romans who were in contact with Greek traders. Exported Greek painted pottery entered Rome in the 6th century BCE and Greek influence on Roman religion in the 5th. Ultimately, the Greek and Roman gods would become indistinguishable. Zeus became Jupiter, Hera became Juno, Aphrodite became Venus, Hephaestus became Vulcan, and so on. Greek awareness of Rome also seems to date to the 5th century.

- The Romans came directly in contact with the Greeks through the settlements the Greeks had founded in southern Italy and Sicily during the Archaic period. These settlements were in some cases as old as Rome itself, being founded around 750 BCE. The concentration of Greek settlements was so dense in southern Italy that the region came to be called Magna Graecia, or "Great Greece."

**The Romans both despised and admired the Greeks. They despised the Greeks for their cunning and trickery and for the fact that, despite all their sophistication and the antiquity of their culture, they were unable to maintain their independence and collapsed under the might of Rome. The Romans admired the Greeks for their inventiveness, originality, and learning.**

- The Greek city-states of Magna Graecia achieved a very high level of material prosperity and cultural sophistication. And it was through contact with these states that the Romans first fell under the enduring spell of Hellenism, which eventually came to influence all aspects of Roman life, including art,* architecture, language, education, medicine, science, philosophy, mythology, religion, and political theory. There was virtually nothing Roman that Hellenism didn't touch.

* One way in which Romans showed their admiration for Greek culture was by the purchase of Greek sculptures.

- On the political front, however, relations between the Romans and the Greeks were by no means always warm and fuzzy. It was in 280 BCE when the Greeks and Romans first clashed. They did so because a Greek city named Thurii, situated on the Tarentine Gulf, in the instep of Italy, appealed to Rome for assistance in their war against the neighboring Greek city of Tarentum. In turn, the Tarentines appealed to Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, a region in northwest Greece.

- This state of affairs was typical of the Greeks in the ancient world. The Tarentines were determined to stem the Roman advance into central and southern Italy, which they saw as stepping on their toes. After two very costly victories—hence the term *Pyrrhic victory*—Pyrrhus was finally defeated and forced to withdraw. It was the first and last time that a Greek army would fight on the soil of peninsular Italy.

- At the end of the Pyrrhic War, Rome had become a major player in the Mediterranean world. By the time of the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 216 BCE, the war between Rome and Hannibal—the Carthaginian general who led his army over the Alps to win three crushing victories over the Romans in their homeland—it had become obvious to any intelligent observer that, in the words of the historian Polybius:

> [I]t is not in the least likely that the victors will be content with ruling Italy and Sicily, but are sure to come to Greece and extend their ambitions and their forces beyond what is just.

- And Polybius was right.

- With the final defeat of Hannibal, Rome immediately turned its attention to the east. It didn't take long. Macedonia was reduced to the status of Roman province in 146, making Roman domination of the Greek mainland unchallengeable.

- A futile revolt broke out, but it was brutally crushed and led to the destruction of Corinth. The Romans weren't going to stand any nonsense from the Greeks. The Seleucid dynasty in Syria surrendered to Rome in 63 BCE. The Ptolemies in Egypt hung on the longest but only as vassals of the Romans.

- In 31 BCE, however, Cleopatra VII took the fatal step of siding with Mark Antony instead of with Octavian. Her forces, along with those of Antony, were defeated at the naval battle of Actium. Soon afterward, they were both dead and Egypt had become a Roman province to be personally supervised by Octavian, a.k.a. the newly minted Roman emperor Augustus.

- The Greeks had proved no match for the Romans, whether in generalship, military training, expertise, or moral fiber. As a result, a great number of Greeks became enslaved and were transported to the capital. The transported slaves, in addition to pilfered works of art, were destined to have a profound effect on Roman culture, which had been somewhat crude before it came in contact with Hellenism.

*Why did the Romans pay so much attention to Greek culture?*

This is a fascinating question that's attempted to be answered in the Great Course *Greece and Rome: An Integrated History of the Ancient Mediterranean*. In essence, the Romans recognized that they had a lot to learn from the Greeks, and they weren't afraid to admit it. They deserve a lot of credit for that.

- One of the ways by which Greece, as the Roman poet Horace put it, "conquered Rome" was through education. Well-to-do Romans hired Greeks to educate their children. These teachers understandably emphasized the importance—indeed, the superiority—of Greek literature.

They also instructed their masters' sons in the benefits of learning disciplines in which they themselves excelled, notably rhetoric, which entered Rome in the last quarter of the 2nd century BCE. A generation later, these teachers began instructing Romans in philosophy, and the upper echelons of Roman society became enamored of the Greek philosophical schools, particularly Epicureanism and Stoicism.

- In the 1st century BCE, leading Romans studied in the Greek-speaking world for the equivalent of college, including Octavian, the future Emperor Augustus. And once Octavian had acquired unchallenged supremacy of the Roman state and was debating with himself what character to assign to his thinly disguised autocracy that came to be known as the principate, he looked to the Greeks and found inspiration in their well-established institution of ruler worship. Octavian also sought to model himself on the image of Alexander the Great as a peerless military leader, even though his own accomplishments in that area were few.

- Augustan literature—the literature that was produced in the age of Augustus—owed a heavy debt to Greek literature. For example, the format, meter, poetic diction, and plot of Vergil's *Aeneid* were directly inspired by Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.

- From the middle of the 1st century CE, the Greek mainland underwent a revival in its fortunes. This was thanks in large part to the interest shown in the country by the emperor Nero, who was highly cultivated in all things Greek. In 67, Nero even announced that he was "liberating" Greece and granting it immunity from taxation. His successor, the emperor Vespasian, withdrew Greece's privileges following a bout of unrest in the province.

- In the 3rd century, Hadrian, one of the greatest philhellenes, or lovers of all things Greek, became emperor. Hadrian was probably at least as fluent in Greek as he was in Latin. Hadrian had a love affair with Athens, which he visited several times, lavishing the equivalent of millions, if not billions, of dollars to beautify it and restore it to its ancient glory.

# BYZANTIUM

- In the 3rd century, the Roman Empire faced multiple incursions and inner conflict, so much so that Diocletian, who became emperor in 284, took the radical step of dividing the empire into two: the western, Latin-speaking half and the eastern, Greek-speaking half. Each half had a ruler with the title Augustus and a deputy named Caesar.

**Diocletian is with justification regarded as laying the foundations of the Byzantine Empire in the east.**

- There were effectively four rulers—hence the name *tetrarchy*, which is what scholars call this period of history. This simple solution succeeded brilliantly. It put an end to domestic turmoil and produced a number of military victories that stabilized Rome's borders.

- In 324, Constantine defeated Licinius, the Roman emperor in the east, and became sole emperor. Two years later, he chose the site of an old Greek city named Byzantium to be the site of the new imperial capital, named Constantinopolis, or "The Polis of Constantine." The city took six years to build and was consecrated in 330. It became the capital of what we call the Byzantine Empire after the deposition of the last Roman emperor in the west in 476.

- It's famed for an architectural masterpiece, Hagia Sophia, or Church of the Holy Wisdom, with its great dome. It was constructed in the reign of the emperor Justinian in 537 and became the cathedral of the Greek Orthodox patriarch. Now, it serves as a Muslim mosque.

- Constantinople survived as the capital of the Byzantine Empire until 1453 in large part because of its fortification system, one of the most elaborate ever built. This dated from its foundation by Constantine, though it was greatly strengthened by the emperor Theodosius II in the 5th century. Today, the remains of Constantinople are situated in the European quarter of Istanbul. As a result of the foundation of Constantinople, the center of gravity shifted from modern-day Italy to modern-day Turkey.

- Constantinople was adorned with numerous artifacts filched from Greece. One was the colossal bronze statue of Athena Promachos, or "Athena Who Fights in the Front Rank," which had stood on the Acropolis in Athens for 1,000 years. It was destroyed in 1204 by a band of drunken and mutinous Crusaders during the Fourth Crusade.

- Following the sack of Constantinople in 1204, the Crusaders divided the Byzantine Empire into a number of successor states, rather like what happened upon the death of Alexander the Great. Then, in 1261, one of these successor states, the empire of Nicaea, retook Constantinople and proclaimed the reinstatement of the Byzantine Empire, though it wasn't nearly as big as its predecessor. Thus began the so-called Palaiologan renaissance, so named after the Palaiologos dynasty, which ruled Constantinople from 1261 to 1453.

- The first emperor was Michael VIII Palaiologos, whose generalship led to the recovery of Constantinople and enabled him to claim that he was restoring Byzantine sovereignty. This was in a sense true, as the Palaiologoi were related by blood to the preceding Byzantine royal house. Michael undertook a major rebuilding program, including the restoration of Hagia Sophia, which had been looted by the Crusaders.

- Scholarship flourished in the Palaiologan period, also known as the late Byzantine period. Manuel Chrysoloras became the first Byzantine scholar to teach ancient Greek; he wrote a book of Greek grammar and taught the first generation of Italian scholars of ancient Greece. Theology also flourished in the Palaiologan, as did the arts.

## BAGHDAD

- When we think of Greek culture, we tend to think of it as a purely Western phenomenon, but that distinction loses credibility when we come to the Byzantine Empire. And it loses further credibility when we move farther east.

- It was Islam that not only kept the classical tradition alive in the East but that also saved many classical texts from oblivion. For that, we must thank the Abbasid caliphate, which came to power in Baghdad, Iraq, in 750.

- The Abbasids ordered the translation into Arabic of virtually every surviving Greek philosophical and scientific text, many of which were accompanied by commentaries. The Greco-Arabic translation movement, as it is sometimes called, had an enormous impact on Arab culture and thinking. The writings of the medical authors Hippocrates and Galen in particular contributed greatly to the rise of Arabic medicine under the Abbasids.

- In the West, Greek philosophy continued to flourish until the 6th century, when it gradually faded. It didn't reemerge until the 9th century, and when it did, that rebirth took place not in western Europe but in the Middle East, where Islamic scholars translated the works of Aristotle† into Arabic and reinterpreted them in the light of the Qur'an.

† It was the 12th-century English philosopher John of Salisbury who was the first to endow Aristotle with the title "the philosopher," which became commonplace throughout the Middle Ages and later.

- First, in the 11th century, the Persian philosopher Avicenna studied the Aristotelian corpus intensely and incorporated it into his philosophical thinking. Then, in the 12th century, a Muslim scholar named Averroës demonstrated that Aristotelian thought was consistent with the Qur'an.

- It was largely due to Avicenna and Averroës that philosophy returned to the West, initially in the form of translations from the Arabic into Latin, Byzantine Greek (a different kind of Greek from Classical Greek), and Hebrew.

- Muslims greatly admired Ptolemy's *Almagest*, one of the most influential astronomical works. It was written in Greek in the 2nd century CE and was translated into Arabic in the 9th century. Three centuries later, it was translated into Latin, which is how it reached Europe. It wasn't until the 15th century that Greek manuscripts of the *Almagest* surfaced in the West, more than half a century after its dissemination throughout the Arabic world.

- Another work that the Arabs preserved was Aristotle's *On the Art of Poetry*, which mainly focuses on tragedy. It first reached the West through a Latin translation of an Arabic translation of a Syriac‡ translation of a Greek manuscript dated to 700.

## READINGS

Garland, *Greece and Rome.*

Millar, *Rome, the Greek World and the East.*

Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander*, ch. 10.

Spawforth, *The Story of Greece and Rome.*

‡ The Syriac source departed wildly from what Aristotle actually wrote, as we now know from an 11th-century Greek manuscript.

LECTURE 7

# Modern Ideas of Ancient Greece

In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks after a two-month siege. And with the fall of Constantinople came the instant demise of the Byzantine Empire, though it had been on its last legs for some time. The fall of Constantinople wasn't just a catastrophe for the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire, however. It sent shockwaves throughout Christendom. Constantinople became the imperial capital of the Ottoman Empire and was officially named Istanbul.*

* *Istanbul* is actually a corruption of two Greek words: *stên polin*, meaning "to the city," the city in question being Constantinople.

# The Ottoman Period

- The year 1453 symbolically marks the end of the Middle Ages. And thus begins the Ottoman period of Greek history. This year also signals the beginning of the animosity between Greeks and Turks that continues to poison relations between the two peoples to this day. The animosity is all the more unfortunate in that the first sultans were pretty enlightened and treated their Greek subjects well. And there were benefits to some sections of the Greek population under Ottoman rule.

- The Greek Orthodox Church and its leaders were perhaps the chief beneficiaries. The church enjoyed greater administrative power than it had in the late Byzantine Empire. The patriarch, the head of the Orthodox Church, enjoyed enormous prestige and importance and was left largely alone by the Ottomans.

- It's also the case that many Greeks converted to Islam in the 1st century or so of Ottoman rule, perhaps as many as 50 percent of the entire Greek population living in modern-day Turkey. They didn't convert because they were compelled to do so or because they were being persecuted. Their main reason, it seems, was to escape the heavy taxes that were leveled on Christians. Greek merchants also did well, profiting from Istanbul's unrivaled commercial importance. All of this is well-documented.

- What we know much less about is how ordinary Greeks fared under the Ottomans, as they haven't left us any literary sources. Occupation is never agreeable, and the Ottomans no doubt perpetrated many abuses of power. It was under Ottoman rule in 1801 that Lord Elgin acquired permission to remove the sculptures that adorned the Parthenon in Athens, claiming he did so on the authority of a mandate obtained from the sultan, though he was only able to produce an English translation. The original has never been found.

- The date of the ending of the Ottoman period is usually given as 1821, the year that the War of Greek Independence broke out in the Peloponnese. However, most of what is today the modern Greek state remained in Ottoman hands until the Balkan Wars, fought at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Ottomans lost all of their possessions in Europe.

- How did the Greeks retain such a strong sense of identity living under foreign rule for 500 years before the outbreak of the War of Greek Independence? How did Hellenism survive the Ottoman period?

- One reason is that the Orthodox Church fostered a sense of community among its worshipers, offering a channel through which Greeks could express their grievances because of the occupation. Another reason is that following the fall of Constantinople, many intellectuals fled to the West—to Italy, principally Venice—in part because the Venetians were constantly at war with the Ottomans.

- The Venetians acquired Cyprus after the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), and shortly after the fall of Constantinople, they acquired Crete in 1212, which they retained until 1669. They also acquired the Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece as well as several Aegean Islands.

- It was also the Venetians who, under Commander Francesco Morosini, launched a mortar attack on the Parthenon,† which the Ottomans were using as an arsenal. Morosini was ultimately unsuccessful in his bid to take Athens, but he stole a number of classical statues and brought them back to Venice.

- However, it was also thanks to the Venetians that the Greeks had contact with the West and—equally important—that the West had contact with the Greeks.

† The Parthenon sustained more damage as a result of an ensuing explosion than it had in its previous 2,000 years of history.

- Knowledge of the Greek language had virtually died out in western Europe by 600 CE, the same time, incidentally, when Greek became the official language of the Byzantine Empire. It survived, to the extent that it survived at all, in the reading of ecclesiastical literature.

- Its disappearance in the West is pretty astounding, considering that the Christian Bible was written in Greek. Probably it had a lot to do with the political as well as doctrinal differences that would ultimately lead to the split, known as the Great Schism, between the Catholic Church in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East in 1054.

- For hundreds of years, there were no grammars, no dictionaries, and virtually no knowledge of Greek in the West. It was the poet and scholar Petrarch, a leading founder of the Renaissance humanist movement and a founder of the liberal arts tradition in education, who took the initiative in trying to restore knowledge of Greek. But it wouldn't be until the very end of the 14th century that the Greek language would make a real comeback in the West.

- In 1397, a Byzantine diplomat and scholar named Manuel Chrysoloras arrived in Italy after the chancellor of Florence invited him to teach Greek there. Chrysoloras thus became essentially the first professor of Greek in western Europe. Though he only taught a small group of humanists in Florence, he inspired them and they inspired others.

- Within a generation, the study of Greek had spread from Florence to other Italian cities: Milan, Padua, Rome, and Venice. This intellectual movement was boosted by the arrival of refugees from the Byzantine Empire, eager to escape the advance of the Ottoman Turks.

- It was thus largely due to the sack of Constantinople in 1453 that many educated Italians began to learn Greek.

# The Renaissance

- Florence, the city where Chrysoloras taught, is where the Renaissance started and came to fruition. *Renaissance* is a French word meaning "Rebirth," though it was first coined in the 1830s in England. It describes the rediscovery of classical antiquity. The art historian Kenneth Clark wrote:

> In the early 15th century Florentines had a sudden burst of confidence …. [Their] chancellors were scholars, believers in learning as a means to happiness, [and] in [the] application of free intelligence to public affairs.

- But what produced that "burst of confidence" in Florence? First, Florence was a republic, a democracy of sorts. It was a self-governed independent state with a population of about 90,000 before the Black Death struck. Its citizens passed their own laws, and any citizen could hold the highest office.

- Keep in mind that Italy was not a nation-state at this time; it was a collection of warring states. Florence saw itself as a free republic fighting a despotism. Specifically, it was the leader of a coalition that was seeking to oppose Milan.

- In 1402, Milan began besieging Florence, and it looked as if everything was over. Then, providentially, the duke of Milan suddenly died of a fever, and his empire collapsed. The Florentines saw their victory as the triumph of republicanism over monarchism, and this gave them the confidence to achieve great things. The victory fired up the founding fathers of the Renaissance, many of whom were Florentines and who were coming to maturity at the time.

**The Renaissance manifested itself in just about every branch of the humanities and the sciences. Its poster child is Leonardo da Vinci, the supreme example of a so-called Renaissance man—that is, a polymath.**

- Up to this point, the basis of education in the Middle Ages had been the study of Latin—not Latin literature, but the Latin tongue, which learned people used in conversation and for correspondence. And now suddenly there arose an interest in Latin literature, which was followed closely by an interest in the Greek language and Greek literature, because the Florentines and others who studied Roman literature made the important discovery that the Roman achievement owed a very heavy debt to the Greeks.

- One of the most influential classical works for the Renaissance was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an epic in 15 books that presents a continuous narrative of myths drawn mainly from Greece, each of which alludes to a metamorphosis, or change of shape. Greek mythology, through the medium of the *Metamorphoses*, impressed itself deeply on Shakespeare, who imported a number of the stories narrated by Ovid into his plays.‡

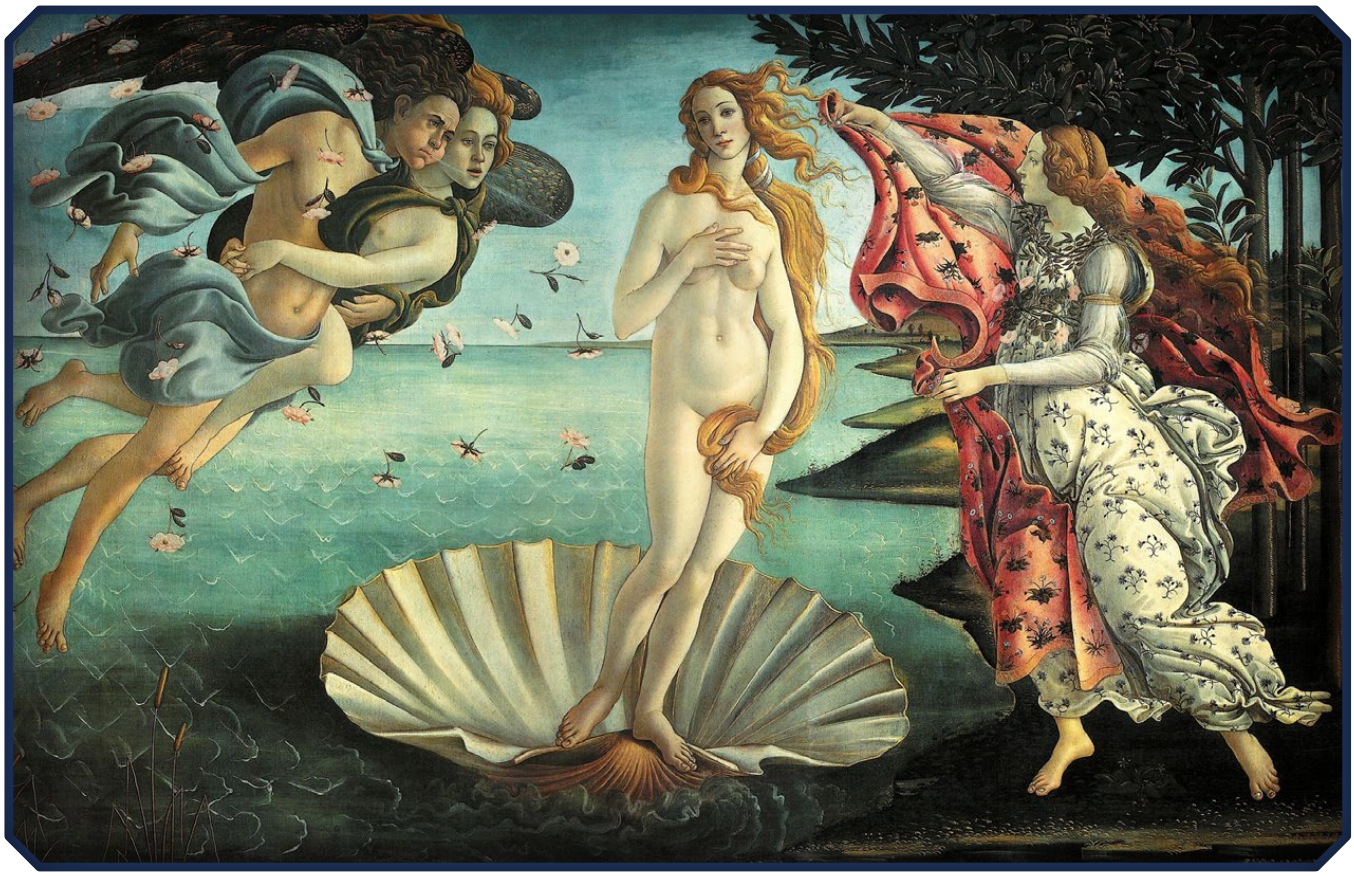
- And then there's art. Where would Western art from the Renaissance onward have been without Greek mythology? Consider *The Birth of Venus*§ by the Florentine artist Sandro Botticelli, dated to the mid-1480s. The painting was inspired by a Greek poem known as the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, dated to the 7th century BCE. Another painting inspired by Greek mythology is Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*.¶

- Greek mythology also had an enormous influence on opera. Richard Strauss wrote a magical opera called *Ariadne on Naxos*, which takes the form of an opera within an opera. Strauss was by no means the first to compose an opera on that theme; Claudio Monteverdi composed *L'Arianna* in 1608. The invention of opera owed much to the rediscovery of Greek tragedy.

‡ Examples include the Pyramus and Thisbe interlude in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the gruesome tale of Tereus mutilating Philomela in *Titus Andronicus*, and the statue-come-to-life theme of Pygmalion in *The Winter's Tale*.

§ This is housed in the Uffizi Gallery in Tuscany, Italy.

¶ This is housed in the National Gallery of London.



*The Birth of Venus*, Sandro Botticelli

- And then there's sculpture. In 1506, in the period we call the High Renaissance, a spectacular Greek sculpture, probably of Hellenistic date, called the *Laocoön* was discovered in the grounds of a vineyard in Rome. Pope Julius II, who loved Greek art, had it installed in the Vatican, and it had a huge impact on Michelangelo.

- In the Middle Ages, the human body had been regarded as unlovely and pitiful and shameful. All that now changed. Renaissance painters and sculptors celebrated the naked human body, and this was largely due to the rediscovery of ancient Greek sculpture.

- Because we don't have any original copies of any Greek authors, Greek literature has come down to us mainly in manuscripts made of parchment placed within covers known as codices, the earliest dating to the 10th century. The most important manuscript collector was Giovanni Aurispa, who traveled to Constantinople to learn Greek and began collecting

manuscripts of the historian Thucydides of some of the plays of Sophocles and Euripides. He arrived in Venice in 1423 with 238 manuscripts, including all the works of Plato. It was therefore Aurispa who brought Plato to the West.

- Aurispa permitted humanists to copy his manuscripts,** and as a result, Greek literature began to be widely disseminated. Before long, the concept of the public library developed. The first was the Laurentian Library in Florence, which was based on plans by Michelangelo and completed in 1571.

- The next development was that Greek prose authors—including Plutarch, Aristotle, and Plato—began to be translated into Latin. A number of translations were sponsored by the pope, Nicholas V. The only Greek poet whose works were translated into Latin was Homer.

- It wasn't until the second half of the 15th century that Greek authors began to be translated first into Italian and later into other European languages. Though many of these translations weren't very accurate, they spread the knowledge of Greek literature to educated people who couldn't read Greek.

- Then, in about 1440, the printing press came along. The leading city in the printing of classical texts was Venice. This was in part because Cardinal Bessarion, a scholar who had translated Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, had contributed his large collection of manuscripts to the city.

- The best representation of the impact of Greek literature on the Renaissance is Raphael's *School of Athens*, completed in 1511, a fresco commissioned by Pope Julius II for his private library in the Vatican. It depicts Greek intellectuals from different epochs, including Aristotle and Plato.

** Today, most Greek manuscripts are housed in the Vatican Library in Rome and in the National Library of France in Paris, but many recovered manuscripts were initially in private collections.

- The Renaissance—a period that began in the 14th century and didn't end until the 17th—came along just at the right moment for human history. Intellectuals and artists became obsessed with the idea that the arts and humanities had declined from antiquity to the period they were living in. They saw a huge educational, cultural, and aesthetic vacuum, and they were fired up with a desire to fill it, not merely by emulating but also by surpassing the ancients, with the intention of restoring the arts and sciences to their former glory. There now emerged a new liberal arts tradition, one based on the study of rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy.

## READINGS

Brotton, *The Renaissance*.

Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*.

Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*.

Tsigakou, *The Rediscovery of Greece*.

LECTURE 8

# The Birth of the Greek Nation-State

Rule by the Ottoman Turks wasn't all bad. The taxation was heavy, Christians were regarded as inferior to Muslims, and lawlessness prevailed in the countryside. But the Greek Orthodox faith functioned, and many Greeks prospered, both in commerce and in the Ottoman bureaucracy. In 1821, the *agônas*, or "struggle," against the Ottoman Turks began. It would last eight years, until 1829. The *agônas* attracted the support of—and to some extent was fueled by—European intellectuals and artists, chiefly British and French, who at the time were very influential in swaying public opinion.

# The Desire for Greek Freedom

- The French Revolution had stirred the desire for freedom in Greece, which was supported by the European philhellenism movement: the movement formed of Europeans who were inspired by and enamored of Greece.

- The origins of philhellenism go back to the Roman period. Emperor Hadrian was known for his love of ancient Greece, particularly Athens, and he was by no means the first Roman to be a philhellene. In a way, Roman culture as a whole was largely philhellene.

- But in the 19th century, it took on a wholly new form. Travelers to Greece, attracted by the spectacular material remains, became entranced by the inhabitants, whom they fancifully imagined to be the direct descendants of Themistocles and Pericles. But this belief, fallacious though it largely was, actually helped shape the course of history.

- Philhellenism was a liberal movement with deep roots in the Romantic movement. It attracted not only intellectuals and classical scholars but also "Christian philanthropists, social reformers, and even plain adventurers, dropouts, and speculators," in the words of Aglaia Kasdagli.

- The *agônas* was extremely bloody. The war began with a massacre of Ottomans living in the Peloponnese, a barbaric act to which the sultan reacted by massacring thousands of Greeks living in Constantinople and Smyrna. Then, in 1822, the island of Chios revolted. The Ottomans massacred approximately three-quarters of the population.

> The rallying cry of the freedom fighters was *eleutheria ê thanatos*, or "freedom or death."

- In response, the young French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix painted a huge canvas called *The Massacre at Chios*, which is haunting in its depiction of misery and despair, with 13 victims awaiting either execution or deportation. The most famous advocate of the Greek cause was the English Romantic poet Lord Byron, who depicted Greece's desire for independence as a rerun of Athens's victory over the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490.

*The Massacre at Chios*, Eugène Delacroix

- Infighting between rival Greek factions was at times as intense as the war itself. Military discipline was slack, and organization virtually nonexistent. Many of the leaders were Klepht, brigands who inhabited the mountains and knew nothing of European-style fighting.

- In 1826, Missolonghi, in the Peloponnese, fell to the Ottomans after a siege that had lasted almost a year. The besieged had suffered terribly, undergoing famine and plague. A failed breakout led to catastrophic loss of life. After the siege was over, the Ottomans displayed 3,000 heads on the walls and burned the city down. Soon afterward, they took Athens. The cause of Greek freedom had, it seemed, run out of steam.

- It was the atrocity at Missolonghi that changed the course of the war, however—by finally awakening the conscience of the great powers: Britain, France, and Russia. Delacroix's great painting of the siege, painted in 1826, the same year as the siege, proved a rallying cry. It did much to bring the French on board, joined by the British and the Russians.

- The defining action in the War of Greek Independence was the Battle of Navarino in 1827. In Navarino, a town on the west coast of the Peloponnese, a joint fleet of British, French, and Russian vessels defeated the Ottomans, aided by the Egyptians. The Ottomans eventually withdrew from mainland Greece in 1829, and Greece's independence was recognized in 1830.

## The Infant Greek State

- In 1832, with the signing of the Treaty of London, Greece became a nation-state ruled by a monarchy. A Bavarian prince was appointed king, Otto I, who was just 17 years old. It should have been a happy time, but it wasn't.

- There were several reasons why things didn't work out as hoped. First, the Greeks were bitterly divided among themselves. Their factionalism had nearly ditched their cause in the war, and the wounds were still very much alive—and would remain alive.

- Second, King Otto was completely inept. Once he reached maturity, he tried to rule as an absolute monarch. This was not a good idea in that day and age, especially in a country that had just won its independence. He was deposed in 1862. His most significant act had been to choose Athens* as the capital of the new kingdom—proof of the mesmerizing effect of Classical Greece on the European imagination at this time.

* Athens was not an obvious, or even a very sensible, choice as the capital. It had already sunk into obscurity in late antiquity (from around 600 CE onward), and in the 19th century, it was no more than a provincial town in a backwater of the Ottoman Empire.

- The third reason why things didn't go well at the start of Greece's independence is because many Greeks were deeply unsatisfied by the outcome of the War of Greek Independence. They'd been hoping for the liberation of all Greek speakers from Ottoman rule. Instead, to their chagrin, the new nation-state comprised just the southern tip of the Balkan peninsula and a few Aegean Islands—merely a quarter of the total Greek population. Today, the nation-state of Greece comprises some 6,000 islands, of which 227 are inhabited.

- In addition, what the Greeks had acquired was by no means the throbbing heart of Hellenism. Far more important were Constantinople and the west coast of modern-day Turkey and the Danubian region to the north. And so there came into being, around the middle of the 19th century, what was called the Great Idea: the liberation of all Greek-speaking lands under Turkish domination and the establishment of Constantinople as their capital.

- The Great Idea was an irredentist one, meaning that its objective was to redeem lands regarded as historically Greek from antiquity onward, and it was all the more emotionally charged in consequence. It was an idea that every Greek should have been able to embrace, but the problem was that it was never well defined, and it caused a deep rift between those who were enthusiastic about using military means to achieve their objective and those who advocated diplomacy.

- In the course of the 19th century, it did, however, bear some fruit, through diplomatic means. In 1864, the Greeks acquired the Ionian Islands—namely, the seven islands off the west coast of Greece that include Ithaca and Corfu—and in 1881, they acquired Thessaly in northern Greece, the region to the south of Macedon. In 1896, Athens hosted the first Olympic Games in the modern series in the newly constructed Panathenaic Stadium,† further testimony to Athens's importance in the Western intellectual tradition.

† The stadium was erected on top of the remains of the marble stadium built by Herodes Atticus in the 2nd century CE and is a modern replica of the original.

PANATHENAIC STADIUM

- Not all Greeks were happy with this embrace of ancient Greece, however, which they saw as a thoroughly Western and non-Greek concept. And to some extent, the rift between those who see Greece as essentially the descendant of its Classical forebears and those who see it in a more complicated and nuanced way persists to this day.

## The End of Ottoman Rule and Beginning of Democracy

- The Greeks acquired much more territory as a result of the Balkan Wars, fought between 1912 and 1913, in which they allied with Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Serbia against the Ottoman Empire. They acquired southern Macedonia; Epirus, the territory to the west of Macedonia; the large islands off the west coast of modern-day Turkey (Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, and Samos); and the very large island of Crete.‡

‡ Crete was the center of that very important, highly sophisticated Bronze Age culture known as Minoan, which flourished in the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE. The island hadn't come under Ottoman rule until the 17th century, when its capital Herákleion finally succumbed after a 20-year siege.

- As a result of this expansion in territory, the population of the Greek nation-state increased from less than 3 million to nearly 5 million. At the same time, however, it created a major problem regarding integration, since a large proportion of the new population wasn't actually Greek, and there were serious divisions between the ethnic groups.

- Five months before the end of World War I in 1918, the Greeks joined the allied cause: Britain, France, Russia, and the US against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. They were rewarded for their 11th-hour assistance by the promise of the prosperous city of Smyrna and its surrounding territory on the northwest coast of modern-day Turkey.

- The first Greek settlement at Smyrna[§] dates back to the 10th century BCE. It's thought to be one of the earliest communities to establish itself as a polis. However, the Ottomans, despite being defeated, weren't prepared to meekly surrender the city. And thus began the ill-fated Greco-Turkish War.

- In 1919, a Greek expeditionary force landed at Smyrna (Turkish name Izmir) intending to liberate the city. The Greeks took the city and held it for three years before a Turkish officer named Mustafa Kemal, later Atatürk, began organizing resistance to the occupation.

- The signing of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 brought an end to the Ottoman Empire. The Turks didn't roll over, however. In September 1922, they torched the city of Smyrna. The fire raged for more than a week, reducing both the Greek and Armenian quarters to rubble, while a British fleet looked on. A city with Greek roots going back 3,000 years was no more. Tens of thousands perished. Six ministers in the Greek government were executed by firing squad for the catastrophe.

- A year after the war ended, the governments of Greece and Turkey agreed to a population swap based on religious identity. It has been estimated that as many as 1.5 million Greeks were forced to leave the former Ottoman Empire and 500,000 Muslims were forced to leave Greece. This remains one of the most terrible examples of ethnic cleansing.

§ Smyrna claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.

- In 1924, Greece established what was called the Second Hellenic Republic. Riven with coups resulting in the exiling of prominent politicians, the republic was abolished in 1935 and the monarchy recalled. The next year, General Ioannis Metaxas seized power as dictator. He promptly declared a state of emergency on the grounds that this was needed to counteract the "communist danger" and adjourned parliament indefinitely.

- Metaxas tried to keep Greece neutral at the outbreak of World War II, but the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini invaded in 1940, and though his troops were driven out, Hitler overran most of Greece the following year. The Nazi swastika was raised on the Acropolis.

- The winter of 1941/1942 was particularly terrible for the inhabitants. A famine, caused by the blockade of Nazi-held Greece by the British navy, led to the death of an estimated 30,000 to 100,000. Athens was eventually liberated in 1944.

- After the war, however, a civil war broke out between Nationalists, supported by the British and the Americans, and the Communists, supported by Marshal Tito, leader of what was to become Yugoslavia. An estimated 100,000 people died in the conflict.

- Then, in 1967, a military coup took place, led by a group of Colonels. The Junta, as it is called, ruled Greece until 1974, when it took the disastrous step of removing the Cypriot president Archbishop Makarios III, a moderate, from office and annexing the island of Cyprus, which was occupied predominantly by Greek speakers.

- Five days after the annexation, the Turks invaded Cyprus. The invasion ended with the partition of Cyprus along what is known as the Green Line, which was established by the United Nations. The Greeks control the south; the Turks control the north.

- The partition caused a humanitarian crisis of major proportions. It's estimated that 200,000 Greek Cypriots became refugees as a result. A lot of looting also took place in the northern half, particularly of Christian art, especially frescoes and icons.

- Then, in 1983, the Turks declared the north to be independent, naming it the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. To this day, it lacks international recognition.

- Though relations between the two parts of the island have warmed somewhat in recent years, the Cyprus problem remains unresolved. A movement to overthrow the Junta began at the University of Athens. Konstantinos Karamanlis, who had been the Greek prime minister before the coup but was living in exile, returned and restored democracy. And Greece remains a democracy today.

## READINGS

Beaton, *Greece*.

Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*.

Gallant, *Modern Greece*.

Kalyvas, *Modern Greece*.

LECTURE 9

# Greek Mythology: Monsters and Misfits

A myth is an exemplary story that reveals what is perceived to be a fundamental truth, whether about the nature and composition of the world, the nature and deeds of the gods, the deeds of heroes, or the evolution of human—or specifically Greek—society. Greece was in many ways a very fractured world, its peoples being at constant war with one another. In such a world, mythology served as a powerful cultural unifier and as a powerful educational tool. It provided people with a sense of a shared past and with the means of interpreting it.

# BASICS OF MYTHOLOGY

- There are many different ways of interpreting myths. They can be interpreted using Jungian, feminist, structuralist, poststructuralist, symbolist, etc., methodologies. Carl Jung, for example, regarded the characters who turn up in myths as archetypes as an expression of the collective unconscious.

- There's also an approach called euhemerism, named after Euhemerus, who lived in the late 4th century BCE. He claimed that myths derived from historical personages or events, a theory that is impossible to either prove or disprove.

- But despite what Euhemerus believed, there is no detectable origin of any myth and no authorized version of any myth, either. Every telling or enactment of a myth is as legitimate as any other. A myth is organic, in other words; it's constantly in flux. Any myth can undergo limitless numbers of retelling and modification, even though the basic plotline remains fixed. Sophocles wrote a play called *Electra*, and so did Euripides, and they're very different.

- The word *myth* in English refers to something that is untrue. For example, the story that George Washington confessed to chopping down a cherry tree at age six is a myth—a fiction or falsehood that has no basis in fact. But *mythos*, from which our word derives, carries no such negative connotation for the Greeks. It merely means a word, speech, or story. And even when it means a story, it doesn't mean an untrue story, though the details of that story weren't fixed.

- Greek myths weren't fashioned merely for the instruction of children, even though that was partly their purpose. They were also fashioned and reinterpreted for the instruction of adults—hence the use to which they were put by the tragic poets, who drew on them almost exclusively for their plots.

> One of the great uses of myth is that it provides a background by which we can work out the relationship of humans to the gods, and it's this background that lies at the heart of Greek tragedy.

## Mythic Literature and the Oral Tradition

- We know about mythology through literature—through Homer and Hesiod and the tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Another important source is the visual arts, notably sculpture and vase painting.

- Our fullest compendia of myths consist of a long poem in Latin by Ovid called *Metamorphoses*, which is a highly individualistic, even eccentric, work that ties together both Greek and Roman myths into a single narrative based on all the shape-shifting that takes place in mythology; and a prose work in Greek called *The Library*, which used to be attributed to someone named Apollodorus, but it's of uncertain authorship and uncertain date.

- But literature was not the medium through which the Greeks encountered their myths. Myths ultimately derive from a preliterate oral tradition, just like the poems of Homer. But, unlike the poems of Homer, most myths were never put into verse, other than in the form of snippets, which is one of the reasons why there was never an authorized version of any myth.

- Myths just got told and retold, often in widely differing versions. Only long after their invention did most of them finally get written down. That's why it's so difficult, even impossible, to say what a myth actually means. We can only try to get to the meaning of a specific version of a myth, not the myth itself, because there is no "myth itself"—no canonical version of a myth.

## Subject Matter of Myths

- The subject matter of myths is anything that was believed to have happened in the distant, or what we would call prehistoric, past—the period before there was any writing or written records. That includes the Trojan War and its aftermath, the source for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.*

* The *Iliad* is set in the tenth and final year of the Trojan War, whereas the *Odyssey* deals with the aftermath of the war, with Odysseus being stranded and still struggling to return home after 20 years away.

> It's through myth that we encounter the dark side of human nature, from which many of us would prefer to avert our gaze. Myth also provides us with an incomparably rich language for coming to terms with that dark side.

- Myth also includes the succession of dynasties from Ouranos to Cronos to Zeus and the Olympian deities. We read about that in a poem called the *Theogony* by Hesiod, Homer's contemporary.

- The Greeks weren't fussed about making any clear distinction between the birth of the Olympian deities and the Trojan War, as if one was made up and the other was historically accurate, any more than someone who takes the Hebrew Bible literally makes any distinction between God creating the world in six days and the reign of King David. Or if they did, they were in a small minority.

- In other words, they didn't acknowledge any difference between what we would call a myth and what we would call a legend, the latter supposedly having a basis in some historical event or personage. The Greeks, by contrast, weren't in a position to differentiate probable fact from probable fiction. So they took it all on board.

- That's not to say they believed any silly story. The historian Herodotus, for instance, goes out of his way to "prove" that Helen never came to Troy; she ended up in Egypt instead. But they didn't go out of their way to challenge the veracity of any myth, either. Why should they, given the fact that they were free to tell each myth their own way?

- One of the reasons why myth is such a powerful vehicle of human expression is because it deals with the big questions of life—questions about how the world came to be the way it is.

- Why, for example, are there so many bad things in the world, such as sickness, famine, disease, and death? According to myth, it's because a woman named Pandora was given a jar containing all these evils and told not to open it, but she was insatiably curious, so all those evils flew out into the world, leaving only one thing still in the jar: hope, which is why humans tend to look on the bright side of life, all evidence to the contrary.

- That story may remind you of Eve being the one who ate the apple of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, since she, too, was incorrigibly curious, though in her case, her curiosity was motivated by a higher desire—the desire for knowledge. But she got punished, as did Adam, who cowardly blamed Eve when the Lord discovered that they had both violated his prohibition. The anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski called these myths of origin charter myths.

- Charter myths may also be highly localized. Why is the city of Athens named after Athena? There was a contest between her and the sea god Poseidon. Each of them gave a gift to Athens. Athena gave Athens an olive tree, signaling that Athens's prosperity would be based on olive oil, whereas Poseidon gave her a spring of salt water, indicating that Athens would have mastery at sea. Athena won the contest, so Athens got to be named after her.

- Charter myths can also explain social institutions. What's the origin of trial by jury? The Athenians set up a homicide court to determine the guilt or innocence of Orestes, who had killed his mother, who had previously killed his father. If it weren't for the establishment of homicide courts, the chain of revenge killings would have lasted forever.

- It's sometimes alleged that many Greek myths are misogynistic and that this indicates that the Greeks themselves were misogynistic. Certainly, there's an impressive chamber of female horrors. There are the 50 daughters of Danaus, who, with a single exception, murder their husbands on their wedding night; Phaedra, who accuses her stepson Hippolytus of raping her after he scornfully rejected her sexual overture; and Medea, who murders her children when her husband Jason informs her that he is leaving her for another woman. These myths demonstrate that women are just as capable as men of committing acts of terrible violence when provoked.

- But men don't come off any better. Cronos, Zeus's father, castrates his own father, Ouranos, and then Cronos devours each of his own children as soon as they are born because he's afraid that one of them will overthrow him.†

† This is the subject of one of the *Black Paintings*, or *Pinturas Negras*, by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, that hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid. It's a terrifying picture of cannibalism because Goya depicts Cronos devouring a youth, not an infant.

# Hero Myths

- Myths that are centered around the concept of the hero include Jason, who stole the golden fleece; Theseus, who killed the Minotaur; Perseus, who rescued Andromeda; and Heracles, who performed the 12 labors. Heroes are distinguished by their physical prowess, appetite for adventure, and willingness to take on superhuman challenges.

- The greatest hero of all was Heracles, who went to all four cardinal points of the compass and beyond—down to Hades to bring up Cerberus, the three- or nine-headed dog that guards the entrance and to the Hesperides far to the west to fetch the golden apples. Heracles is a symbol of the indomitability of the human will. There were also many heroines, but they were much less prominent in myth than heroes.

*Hercules Slaying the Hydra*, Adriaen de Vries

- A common feature of stories about heroes is that the hero must undertake a journey—an outward journey, but also an inward one of self-discovery. The earliest such journey is the one undertaken by Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the ancient Mesopotamian text that tells of a king of Uruk in Iraq.‡ In the course of his journey, Gilgamesh, who is two parts divine and one part human, learns of his limitations. In seeking glory, he causes the death of his dear friend Enkidu.

‡ The origin of many Greek myths lies in the Middle East.

*Achilles Swears an Oath to Avenge the Dead Patroclus, Killed by Hector*, Bartolomeo Pinelli

- In Homer's *Iliad*, the Greek hero Achilles has to come to terms with the fact that life is unjust and that if you stick rigidly to your principles, it may cost you dearly. By defending his honor and seeking imperishable fame, he causes the death of his best friend Patroclus, rather like Gilgamesh. He also learns that it's vitally important never to forget that your enemy is a human being, no matter how much you hate him or her, which is why he returns the body of Hector, who slew his friend Patroclus, to Hector's father, Priam.

- Odysseus in the *Odyssey* undertakes a long and tortuous journey home to Ithaca from Troy, in which he, too, discovers his human identity. This is defined in terms of his opposition to savages like the Cyclopes, who don't obey any laws, or to the overly privileged Phaeacians, whose ships don't depend on the exertion of rowers but row themselves.

- The Greeks knew that success takes its toll. Heracles, it turns out, was both a murderer and a rapist, someone who abused his position and strength. His infidelity led to the death of his devoted wife Deianeira, who tried to revive his flagging affections with the use of what she believed to be a love potion but is actually a poison.

- The Greeks saw their heroes as complex individuals who frequently failed to conduct themselves morally and honorably, as might have been expected of a so-called hero. They certainly weren't saints, and though some of their exploits were beneficial to humankind—such as Heracles's slaying of the Nemean lion, which made Nemea much safer—many of their exploits were quite useless, such as Heracles's search for the golden apples.

- Heroes weren't only regarded as heroes because they undertook stupendous deeds, however. A life that lay outside the normal range of human experience could also confer heroic status. Oedipus, for instance, didn't become a hero because of his prowess or his brave deeds, but because he did awful things that no human being should do: He killed his father and married his mother.§ It makes no difference that he did these terrible things inadvertently; he transcended the limits normally observed by mortals.

## READINGS

Buxton, *The Complete World of Greek Mythology.*

Garland, *Gods and Heroes.*

Graves, *The Greek Myths.*

Hamilton, *Mythology.*

Morford, Lenardon, and Sham, *Classical Mythology.*

§ Sigmund Freud was wrong to make Oedipus the eponymous founder of the Oedipus complex, since Oedipus had no attraction for his mother per se. You can't be accused of having an Oedipus complex unless you know that the woman you've fallen for is your mother.

LECTURE 10

# Greek Religion: Dangerous Gods, Tricky Heroes

Greek religion offers an explanation of why the world functions the way it does: why terrible things happen and why good and evil are often entwined. To enter the mind of a practicing Greek polytheist, we need to jettison almost all of our assumptions about religion, whatever our system of belief or nonbelief happens to be. We need to enter a world that is as alien to us as any could be. No current system of belief comes remotely close.

# Greek Polytheism

- The Greeks did not subscribe to any dogma or creed. They did not follow any rule of life. They did not deny themselves worldly pleasures. They didn't have a conscience. They didn't believe in sin or redemption, and they had very little fear of eternal damnation. There was no religious hierarchy. There was no pastoral role for the priesthood. Priests and priestesses were not expected to set an example to their flocks. They didn't have flocks.

- There was hardly any division between religion and ordinary life. Religion wasn't cordoned off from other aspects of life, as it is for most of us living in the modern world, no matter how religious we are. The secular and the profane were constantly intersecting with one another. Every human activity—private and public, domestic and civic, social and military—contains a religious dimension in the eyes of the Greeks. That is perhaps why there is no word for religion in Greek. Being religious was being a Greek. It was essential to Greek identity.

- The Greeks were polytheists, which means believing in many gods. Polytheism is a system of classification, a way of ordering and conceptualizing the world, a way of distinguishing and differentiating different types of power. It's also an extension of the hierarchical organization of human society—a society that is based on the family and run by a monarchy, the system in place when Greek polytheism evolved.

- Greek religion, like all polytheistic religions, was in constant flux. Old cults were waning while new cults were coming into prominence. Greek religion changed in accordance with changes in the world and changes in people's view of the world. And that is one of the reasons why it lasted so long: It was highly adaptive.

- The Greeks didn't remain polytheists. The Greek-speaking world began to Christianize in the 1st century CE, though mainland Greece, Athens in particular, was one of the last places to convert to Christianity—not until the 7th century.

# Characteristics of Greek Gods

- The Greek gods were everywhere and in everything. They were in your body, in your head, in the weather, in the crops, in the seasons, on the battlefield, in your home, in your city, in your village, and in what you ate and drank.

- The only human experience that the gods steered clear of was death, because the dead were a source of pollution and the gods had to preserve their purity. In consequence, the gods had nothing to offer the dying by way of consolation.

- The gods whom the Greeks believed in were anthropomorphic, meaning "having a human shape." The only difference between their bodies and ours is that theirs were physically perfect. The gods were just like us in their personality traits. They were jealous, vengeful, unpredictable, selfish, cowardly, mendacious, tricky, egotistical, cruel, and downright beastly to one another.

- They were constantly bickering with one another and trying to get the upper hand, and they were only marginally concerned with the welfare of human beings. From a divine perspective, human life doesn't matter much at all.

- The Greeks did not worship their gods because of their loving-kindness, to use a Christian term. They worshipped them because they were powerful and because it could be extremely dangerous not to worship them.

- The gods liked to do everything that we like to do—eat, drink, sleep, and have sex. They also enjoyed watching humans do things in their honor, such as hold festivals.*

* The great frieze on the Parthenon—the temple of Athena Parthenos on the Acropolis in Athens—depicts the gods sitting at their leisure watching the great festival being held in honor of Athena, the so-called Panathenaea, or "All-Athenian Festival."

The objective of every religion is to neutralize the most fearsome and unpredictable aspects of human experience. There are seven main areas of human experience that were subject to intervention by the Greek gods: war, agriculture, health, the accumulation of wealth, fertility, childbirth, and safe passage at sea.

## How Do We Know What We Know about Greek Religion?

- There was no holy book like the Qur'an or the Torah or the Upanishads or the Christian Bible for the Greeks. All we have is a collection of highly unrepresentative writings produced by the least typical minds of the period, whose perspective on religion is likely to have been somewhat idiosyncratic.

- The greatest influence on how the Greeks thought of their gods was Homer, who taught the Greeks to think of the Olympians as an extended human family, with all the tensions, conflicts, distrust, and jealousy that entails. In addition, we have the poems of Hesiod; the history of Herodotus; the plays of the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; the plays of the comic dramatist Aristophanes; the speeches of the orators; and the dialogues of Plato.

- We also have many sculptures and other works of art of a religious nature, many of which have been found in tombs. We have inscriptions and the remains of sanctuaries. We have votive offerings, or offerings made to the gods intended to get the gods on one's side.

# THE OLYMPIANS

- Before the Olympians came into being, there was Chaos, which means the "Gaping Void," out of which was born Earth (Gaia) and Sky (Ouranos), who mated and had offspring. Their offspring were named Cronos and Rhea. With the offspring of Cronos and Rhea, we come to the generation we call the Olympians—so named because they inhabit the peak of Mount Olympus in northern Greece.

- The Olympians will go on living forever,† but unlike the Jewish God or the Christian God or the Muslim God Allah, they haven't existed from the beginning of time. They were all born into this world. So they're not creative in the sense that the God of these Abrahamic religions is a creator. They're members of a dynasty that happens to be in power right now but that could at any moment be replaced.

- At the head of the pantheon is Zeus, "the father of gods and men." He is the head of the Olympian household. He uses a lightning bolt to punish miscreants.

- Zeus's wife is Hera. She's a nagging wife—at least that's how she's portrayed in Homer. She's also the goddess of marriage. She has the earliest temples in Greece, on the island of Samos.

- Poseidon is the god who causes tempests. He was outbid by Athena in the contest for lordship of Attica.

- Athena is the deity most intimately associated with Athens, though her worship isn't confined to that community. She's normally portrayed as an armed maiden, her emblem being the aegis, her breastplate, which puts the enemy to flight. She's closely associated with her father Zeus, from whose head she sprang when Hephaestus struck it with his hammer to relieve Zeus's headache.

† The Olympian gods don't grow old or older because they're ageless: Zeus is middle-aged, Apollo is a young man on the brink of adulthood, Aphrodite is young and beautiful, etc.

- Apollo was perceived as a youth at the height of his physical perfection. He epitomizes the turning point between childhood and manhood. He's the god of colonization, the god of cryptic oracles, the god of healing, and the god of plagues. He also represents reason and intellect.

- Dionysus is the god of wine, intoxicated ecstasy, and drama. Mysteries associated with Dionysus promised a blessed afterlife for initiates.

- Artemis, Apollo's twin sister, is both hunter and protector of wild animals. She is both a virgin and a birth goddess.

- Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, was the ultimate cause of the Trojan War. That's because she beat Hera and Athena in the divine beauty contest. She did so by bribing the judge, the Trojan prince Paris, with the promise that if he chose her, he could have the most beautiful woman in the world. Unfortunately, the most beautiful woman in the world just happened to be the wife of Menelaus, a Greek king—hence the war.

- Hermes‡ is god of boundaries and the patron of heralds and thieves. As *psychopompos*, or "leader of souls," he conducts the dead to Hades. He's also the divine messenger, so he travels from earth to Olympus frequently using winged sandals.

- Demeter is goddess of the harvest. Her daughter Persephone was abducted by Pluto, lord of the underworld. Demeter went in search of Persephone, and the whole of humankind would have perished had not Zeus intervened and struck a deal with Pluto: Persephone would spend summer on Olympus and winter in the underworld.§

- The lame god Hephaestus is a divine blacksmith, which is appropriate because this was a job that the lame in ancient Greece performed. Being disabled, he was an outsider among the perfect Olympians.

‡ Hermes's name derives from *Herma*, meaning "a heap of stones." He is god of boundaries because you mark a boundary with a heap of stones.

§ This myth was central to the Eleusinian Mysteries, secret rites requiring initiation that were held at Eleusis, 13 miles west of Athens, where Persephone was abducted by Pluto.

- Ares, god of war, was sacrificed to by armies but had few temples.

- The Olympians weren't the only deities whom the Greeks worshiped. There were also the gods who lived underground––the so-called chthonic deities. The Greeks believed in dark forces underfoot, as well as luminous forces up above. Chthonic gods tended to be extremely sinister, such as the repulsive Furies, whom we encounter in Aeschylus's play the *Eumenides*.

- We know much less about the chthonic gods than we do about the Olympians because the former has left far fewer traces in the literary and archaeological record. The Greeks didn't build temples to the chthonic gods; they worshiped them in subterranean passages and the like.

- The chthonic gods included the heroes. The division between gods and humans wasn't absolute; there was some crossover. And one hero at least, Heracles, was admitted to Olympus and became a god.

## Justice and Morality

- In general, the Greeks faced an insurmountable problem in making their gods upholders of morality. For example, Zeus deposed his father Cronos, who had deposed—and castrated—his own father, Ouranos. Zeus was also a womanizer. We know the names of more than 130 of the women whom he seduced, and there were undoubtedly hundreds more.

- Though the gods are superhuman physically, they are less than human morally. As a result, piety and impiety in Greek religion have nothing to do with saintliness and sin. The Christian model of sin, followed by the hope of redemption, has no equivalent in Greek religion. The most crucial difference between paganism and Christianity in this regard is that whereas Christianity treats sin and wickedness as something separate from and antithetical to the supreme being, paganism represents it as something contained within the essence of godhead itself.

- The rewards for piety came in this life, not the next. No Greek ever acted piously in the expectation that, in the words of Christ, he or she was "storing up treasures in heaven." Instead, he or she expected, and was assured of, advancement and success in this world, the only world that mattered to him or her.

- Impiety included theft from a sanctuary or the destruction of something sacred, which was equivalent to robbing the god. It was a capital offence to cut down the sacred olive trees, for instance, because they belonged to Athena.

The Olympians had their local variants. Athena, for instance, had no fewer than 50 different manifestations according to her numerous cult epithets.

- An offense against the gods that doesn't quite fall within the sphere of impiety is hubris, an excessive pride in one's capacity and good fortune that excites the envy of the gods. It may seem curious to us that the majesty of the gods could be threatened by a mere mortal, but it is clear that they didn't take kindly to anyone who presented him- or herself as a rival.

- The choruses in Greek tragedy are constantly reiterating the virtues of keeping your head down. On the other hand, if you were phenomenally successful, there wasn't much you could do about it. In other words, good fortune could be a curse as much as a blessing.

- An area of behavior that we'd expect to be regarded as impious but wasn't is saying disrespectful things about the gods or presenting them disrespectfully on stage. It is one of the most remarkable features of Greek religion that the gods could be legitimately presented as fornicators, cowards, gluttons, and thieves.

- The gods were concerned with justice and morality only insofar as these impinged on their own dignity as divine beings. Crimes such as theft, embezzlement, assault, and rape did not normally concern them. The only crimes they punished were impiety and perjury, both of which diminished the majesty of the gods. In other words, the gods were concerned with offenses against themselves; they weren't concerned with offenses against human beings.

- The reason why the gods couldn't be the upholders of the moral order is that they were all too human—petty, mean-spirited, spiteful, vindictive, deceitful, greedy, and licentious. Or at least that's the way they are depicted in Homer, who is pretty much all we've got to go on, apart from the tragedians, who certainly don't present the gods in a favorable light, either.

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LECTURE 11

# The Sensuality of Greek Sculpture

It's conventional to divide Greek sculpture into six periods*: Early Archaic or Daedalic, Archaic, Early Classical or Severe, High Classical, Late Classical, and Hellenistic. Greek sculpture, like all Greek art, is dynamic. It's always evolving, until we reach the Hellenistic period in the late 4th century. This means that a sculpture can often be dated to within 10 years from stylistic considerations, whereas in the case of Egyptian art, we're often lucky if we can date a work to a particular century.

* We owe this division to the German archaeologist and art historian Johann Winckelmann, who in 1755 classified Greek art according to his own subjective sense of style, giving pride of place to Phidias, the chief sculptor of the Parthenon—hence the use of the word *classical*, meaning in this context "best."

# Archaic Statuary

- We call the earliest phase of Greek sculpture the Early Archaic or Daedalic phase. *Daedalic* derives from the name of the mythical artist and engineer Daedalus,† who built the famed labyrinth to house the Minotaur. The Daedalic style is characterized by wig-like hair; an inverted triangle for a face; large, almond-shaped eyes; a prominent nose; and strict frontality.

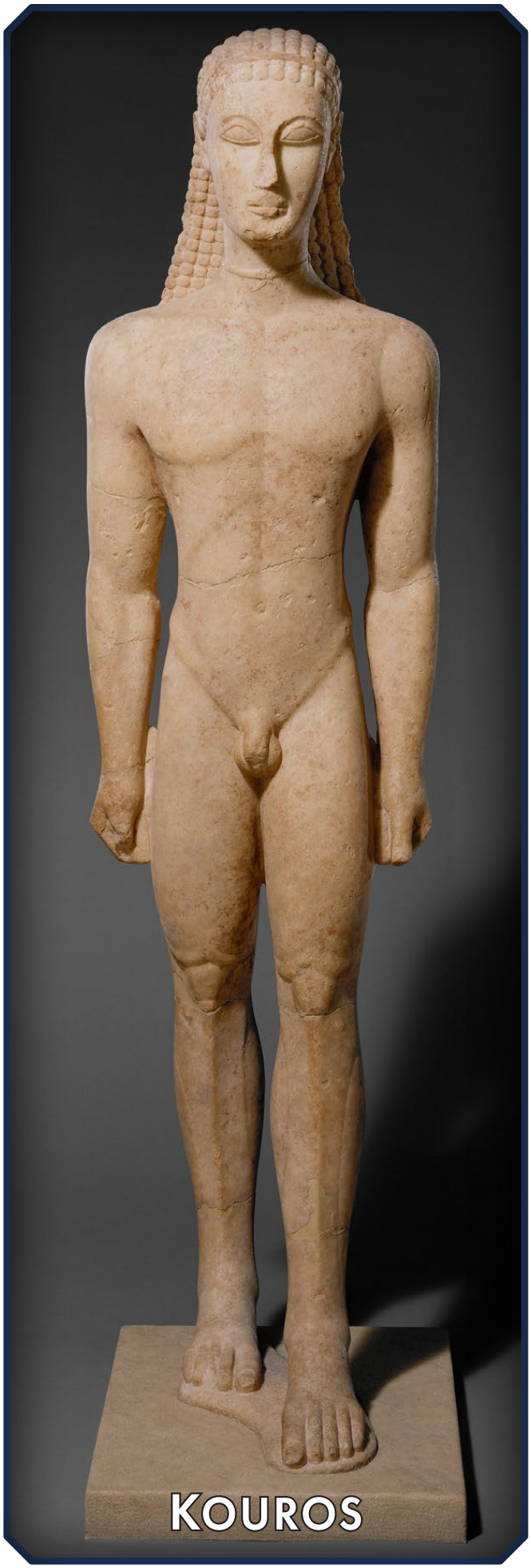
- A magnificent example is the *Lady of Auxerre*, conventionally dated to 650 BCE, or perhaps a bit later. How she made her way to a provincial French town—Auxerre—is a total mystery; she was discovered in the vaults of the local museum in 1907. There's a local tradition that before her discovery as a priceless example of Daedalic art, she was used as a stage prop in the local theater and, whenever she wasn't on stage, as a hatstand for theatergoers. She now resides in the Louvre in Paris. The statue's limestone comes from Crete, and probably she was carved in Crete.

*Lady of Auxerre*

† When King Minos, Daedalus's employer, refused to let him go, Daedalus invented wings for his son Icarus and himself, which he ill-advisedly attached to the body by wax. This design fault led to the death of his son Icarus, who flew too near to the sun, causing the wax to melt and the wings to detach.

- You can still see traces of the polychrome decoration on the lady's elaborately patterned dress. She's placing a hand between her pronounced breasts in what is probably a gesture of worship. She's flashing what is known as the Archaic smile: the enigmatic smile that appears on many statues throughout the Archaic period, males as well as females, though what it means is anyone's guess. Below the waist, where her body is rendered as a flattened column with just the hint of a depression where the legs separate, her feet peek out from beneath her dress. She's elegant, poised, and alluring.

- The male equivalent of the standing draped female is the life-size, or slightly larger than life-size, standing nude male, beardless and long-haired. The arms are at the side and the fists are clenched. He's broad-shouldered and narrow-waisted. His left leg is advanced, but in all other respects, he's perfectly symmetrical. Art historians have given him the name *kouros*, which means "youth."



- A notable early example of the kouros type is one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art that's conventionally dated circa 600 BCE. It was carved out of a rectangular block of marble and still evokes that shape. Though it's an example of sculpture in the round, the sculptor has treated it as an object to be looked at from four distinct sides, rather than one to be appreciated from every possible angle. And features such as hair, eyes, ribcage, and kneecaps all reveal more interest in expressive abstraction than in what we might call, perhaps misleadingly, realism.

- The features don't evoke any understanding of anatomy. They are decorative or superficial or both. The hair is indicated by horizontal layers, the eyes by lozenges, the ribcage by shallow arches, the muscles above the kneecaps by paired half circles, and so on.

- Some 200 kouroi (plural of *kouros*) have been found throughout the Greek-speaking world, most in a fragmentary condition. Understandably, they're highly prized possessions in museum collections.

- We don't know for certain who the kouros is supposed to represent. It used to be thought that it depicted the god Apollo, since many have been found in sanctuaries, but it might just as well be the depiction of a worshiper undertaking eternal service. And others were placed on tombs to commemorate the dead. So perhaps they are mere mortals, albeit idealized.

- The female counterpart of the kouros is the *kore*, meaning "young girl." Though kouroi are depicted naked, korai (plural of *kore*) are invariably draped in this period. It was regarded as shameful for a woman to display herself naked. As time went by, however, sculptors increasingly made breasts, thighs, and buttocks visible beneath the drapery. The visibility of the female form was facilitated by a change in attire—from the thick peplos to the thin, figure-hugging chiton.

- As with kouroi, we don't know who korai are supposed to represent. Most likely, they are intended to depict young girls paying their devotions to a goddess, though some may have served as grave monuments.

- The Acropolis in Athens has supplied us with a series of korai, covering the period from 550 to 480, which is when the Persians burned down the temples on the Acropolis and smashed all the dedicatory statues. After the Persians had departed, the Athenians reverently buried all these statues, which is why we have so much stunning Archaic statuary, albeit some of it in a ruined condition.

- An example is the *Peplos Kore*, so named because she's wearing a peplos over a chiton. She's dated to around 530 BCE, by which time the heavy peplos had been replaced by the lighter, figure-revealing chiton. Like the *Lady of Auxerre*, she's flashing the Archaic smile. Her left arm, which is missing, was originally attached and held an offering. When you look at the *Peplos Kore*, think polychrome, because she was originally brightly painted, just like the *Lady of Auxerre*. In fact, some traces of paint are still preserved.

*Peplos Kore*

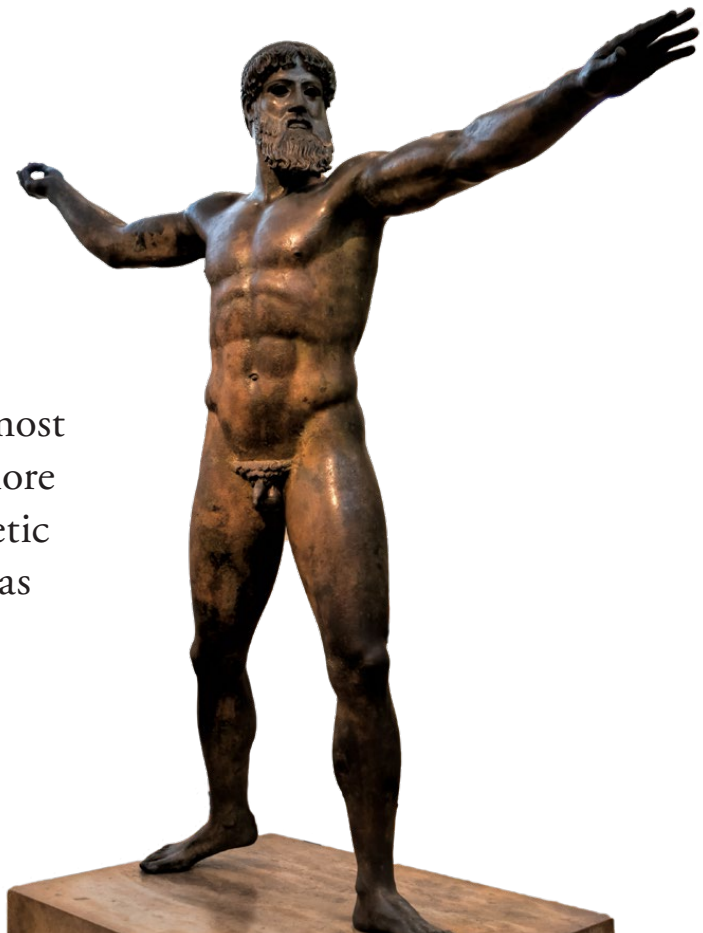
# Early Classical Style

- Everything changed in the Greek world after 480—after the Persians had been seen off. The Archaic smile had gone for good, as exemplified by the so-called Blond Boy, who is named for the surviving traces of yellow paint once visible in the hair and who looks contemplative. For this reason, the Early Classical style is sometimes referred to as the Severe style.

- An example of a sculpture from this period is the so-called bronze Poseidon, dated 460 BCE. Actually, the subject of the sculpture depends on what he was holding in his throwing arm: either a trident, in which case he's Poseidon, or a thunderbolt, in which case he's Zeus. The sculpture was dredged up from the sea off the east coast of Greece at Artemisium. It's one of the most vigorous works of its period.

- The sculptor has caught the god just at the moment before he lets fly; the body weight rests on the heel of his advanced left foot and the toes of the right. The head conveys immense authority. Originally, it was provided with colored inset eyes, as was common with bronze statuary, and it would have looked very lifelike. Though the composition is three-dimensional, he's an action figure in high relief, most effectively viewed from the sides.

- This sculpture, like all large-scale bronze sculptures, is a product of the lost-wax technique, which was developed around 550 BCE. The lost-wax technique enabled greater freedom in the poses of the figures due to the greater tensile strength of metal over marble. We don't have many bronze statues because most of them have been melted down, being more valued for their material than their aesthetic quality. But they were at least as popular as marble statues in antiquity.



- The Severe style came to an end around 450 BCE.

# High Classical Style

- An example of the High Classical style is Polycleitus's *Doryphoros*, or *Spear Carrier*. The original, in bronze, was dated 440 BCE, but we only know it today from marble copies made in the Roman era. They depict a large, muscular, nude warrior who is carrying a spear.

- The statue claims our attention on two scores: the proportions of the body and the balance between muscular tension and relaxation.

  - Polycleitus believed that there was a harmony in the relationship of each part of the body to every other part, based, it is thought, on the terminal joint of the little finger, which is carried through in the relationship between the head and the body, which is one to seven.

  - The *Spear Carrier* is advancing toward us. His left, spear-carrying arm is tense, as is his right, advanced leg, whereas his right arm is slack, as is his left leg, since it has yet to step forward and bears no weight. The statue is an example of what art historians call contrapposto, also known as chiastic. The contrapposto is continued in the torso, with the right hip higher than the left and the left shoulder slightly higher than the right.

*Doryphoros*, Polycleitus

- The *Spear Carrier* was highly influential both in antiquity and beyond. The *Prima Porta* statue of the Roman emperor Augustus adopts a similar pose, as does Michelangelo's *David*.

- The gold and ivory‡ statue of Zeus at Olympia by the Athenian sculptor Phidias depicts Zeus sitting on his throne. It was judged one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Sadly, no trace of it has survived, so all we have to go on is a description by Pausanias, a Greek writer living in the Roman period. The gold and ivory, which were modeled, were attached to a carved wooden core.

## Late Classical Style

- The Late Classical period of Greek sculpture began around the middle of the 4th century. Perhaps the greatest sculptor of this age was the Athenian Praxiteles. His most famous surviving statue is in Olympia and depicts Hermes cradling the infant Dionysus—a highly unusual subject. Hermes was holding a bunch of grapes above the head of Dionysus, god of wine, in Hermes's missing right arm. The carving is a mold breaker, as compared with Polycleitus's *Spear Carrier*.

- Whereas the *Spear Carrier* is all musculature and testosterone, the *Hermes* is sensuous and almost feminine. And whereas the *Spear Carrier* has hard anatomical divisions between the various parts of his body, the *Hermes* flows almost imperceptibly from one to another. The effect is heightened by the exquisitely subtle way in which Praxiteles represents the texture of skin. No less innovative is the pose: Hermes leans lightly on a support, which causes a sinuous and very sensuous curve to run the length of his body.

‡ The technical term for a sculpture made of gold and ivory is *chryselephantine*—with *chrys* meaning "gold" and *elephantine* meaning "ivory," which comes from an elephant.

- Praxiteles produced one of the first life-size female nudes in Greek art. The original hasn't survived, but we have several copies dating to the Roman period. It depicts the goddess Aphrodite preparing for a bath, with a jug of water beside her. She's holding her clothing in her left hand and covering her pubic area with her right. She can't cover everything in that pose, so we see her naked breasts. She's standing in the contrapposto position, just like Polycleitus's *Spear Carrier*.

> The *Hermes* is the only original statue by Praxiteles to survive, and if we'd lost it, we'd have no way of appreciating his greatness.

## Hellenistic Style

- The Hellenistic period begins with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 and ends with the final Roman conquest of the Greek-speaking East in 30 BCE.

- Dated circa 200 BCE, the marble statue *Victory of Samothrace*, which is in the Louvre, was probably dedicated to the goddess by the people of Rhodes after their victory over the Syrian king Antiochus III. The goddess has been caught in the act of alighting on the prow of a ship. We know the ship is moving at high speed because her drapery billows out behind her, caught by the wind. Her right arm was raised (it's now lost), ready to place a crown or sash on the victor.

*Victory of Samothrace*

- Of similar date, or somewhat later, is the *Altar of Zeus and Athena at Pergamon*, housed in the Altes Museum in Berlin. The altar itself, which is dwarfed by the surrounding architecture, is set within a colonnade on a high base. It's approached by a broad flight of steps with projecting wings on either side. The internal frieze is largely lost, but the external frieze shows a battle between giants and gods. The figures writhe and lunge and contort and twist in a manner that suggests chaos—except we, the viewers, know the outcome of the struggle and that order will eventually prevail.

*Altar of Zeus and Athena at Pergamon*

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LECTURE 12

# The Perfection of Greek Architecture

Greek architecture is like Greek religion or the Greek language. It's pretty much uniform, from the westernmost settlement in Spain to the shores of the Black Sea. The earliest Greek temples, thought to date to about 600 BCE, were made of wood, and these have not survived. They were based on house plans, as we know from miniature models that have survived. That's appropriate, since temples were regarded as temporary homes of gods when they happened to be visiting an area.

Temples were constructed from the outside in.

## The Temple of Apollo

- The earliest surviving temple is that of Apollo at Corinth. It's dated to about 540 BCE, and it shows its age. The columns are stout and closely bunched together, indicating that the architect was wary of extending the entablature (the horizontal part above the columns) in case it cracked.

- In general, the Temple of Apollo displays many of the features that will become conventional in temple building. It has a peripteral (meaning an outer colonnade running around all four sides of the temple), hexastyle (meaning six columns at the shorter end) colonnade. Like the Parthenon, the Temple of Apollo has a pronaos, a kind of porch at the front end, and a separate room at the rear known as an opisthodomos, which was used to store equipment. The columns are in the Doric order.

Temple of Apollo at Corinth

# Orders of Greek Architecture

- There are three orders of Greek architecture: Doric, Ionic,* and Corinthian.†

- Doric is often characterized by the words *heavy*, *simple*, and *masculine*, whereas Ionic is described as *ornate*, *delicate*, and *feminine*. Whereas Doric columns stand directly on the floor of the temple, Ionic columns rest on circular bases divided horizontally into convex and concave moldings. Whereas Doric columns have simple circular capitals, Ionic columns terminate in fanciful volutes, rounded like the ends of bolsters.

- In the Doric order, there are alternating triglyphs and metopes above the columns. The triglyphs are marked with vertical grooves, whereas the metopes, roughly square in shape, are decorated with relief sculptures. In the Ionic order, there's a frieze with figures in relief above the columns. One of the things that makes the Parthenon on the Acropolis so unique is that it's a combination of both Doric and Ionic, though the frieze isn't above the columns but inside them on the walls of the cella.‡

- The Corinthian was the last order of Greek architecture to be developed and the most complex of the three. Its most distinctive feature is its capital, which takes the form of a bunch of acanthus leaves. Dated to 427 BCE, the earliest-known example is a single Corinthian column found inside the Temple of Apollo Epicurius ("The Healer") at Bassae in the Peloponnese.

* The Ionic order may have been invented in Ionia, western modern-day Turkey and the offshore islands.

† Despite its name, the Corinthian order doesn't seem to have a lot to do with Corinth.

‡ Latin word meaning the bare temple itself.

## THE ACROPOLIS AND THE PARTHENON

- Most city-states in the Greek world had an *acropolis*—which just means "high city"—but the Acropolis in Athens is the most notable one. The rock in question is 512 feet high. The temples that are preserved on the top were built in the second half of the 5th century BCE and stand on an artificially flattened platform.

- Imagine that you're visiting the Acropolis in the final decade of the 5th century, before Athens suffers defeat at the hands of the Peloponnesians. To get up onto that platform, you have to climb about 150 steps, with large gaps in between, though there's a central ramp in the middle by which sacrificial animals can ascend.

- As you climb, all you can see is the monumental gateway known as the Propylaea, with its three entrances. When you are about to pass through the Propylaea, you see on your right an exquisite miniature temple, the Temple of Athena Nike, or "Athena Victory," which is a foretaste of what is to come. But you can't see anything else—you can't see the temples inside—because they're completely blocked off by the Propylaea, which extends the full length of the western end of the Acropolis. The Propylaea resembles a temple; it has both a pediment and columns.

- The one thing you can see rising above the height of the Propylaea from the outside is a colossal bronze statue of Athena Promachos, or "Athena Who Stands in the Front Rank." It's only when you have ascended the last step and have passed through one of the entrances that the temples on the Acropolis hit you in the eye.

- On your right is the Parthenon, the temple of Athena Parthenos, or "Athena the Maiden." It's so perfect that not a single line in it is straight: All the horizontal lines curve upward so that they are convex, and all the columns lean slightly inward. This is to compensate for the fact that a perfectly horizontal line would look as if it were sagging and a perfectly upright column would look as if it were leaning outward.

- As you pass through the Propylaea, the Parthenon presents its short western facade to you. That's not where you enter the temple, however. The entrance is at the far, eastern end. But while you're here, look at the pediment that crowns the temple. A pediment is an elongated, obtuse-angled triangle. Inside this triangle, you see the contest taking place between Athena and Poseidon for the possession of Athens.

- Most of what survives of the scene, like so much else of the sculpture of the Parthenon, is today in the British Museum. Poseidon has caused a jet of salt spray to spurt up, whereas Athena has caused an olive tree to sprout. The gods on either side of the contest are gradually turning toward the central scene. The composition is masterly, with the tension exploding in the center, where the miracles take place.

- If you look to your left, roughly parallel to the Parthenon, you'll see a much smaller temple, the Erechtheum, the temple of Poseidon Erechtheus.§ It marks the spot where the contest took place, and there's an olive tree there to this day. The Erechtheum is an architectural gem—the most complicated Greek temple ever built. It's Ionic. It's most famous for the so-called Porch of the Maidens on its southern side, the side you can see. Columns known as caryatids are in the form of maidens, bearing the weight of the entablature on their heads.

- You're going to have to walk 230 feet—the full length of the building—before you turn the corner at the far end and then another 50 feet—half the length of the short side—before you'll arrive at the entrance to the Parthenon.

- While you're walking that distance, look at the frieze¶ attached to what is known as the cella underneath the outer row of columns. It depicts a cavalcade of horsemen. When you begin your walk at the western end, the cavalcade is moving slowly, but as you advance, its speed increases. Then, you turn the corner and see sacrificial animals, officiants, and then—almost in the center but actually on either side of the center—the

§ Erechtheus was an early king of Athens.

¶ The Parthenon frieze is continuous and runs around all four sides of the cella. It was 524 feet in length, of which only 65 feet survives in total. It's 3 feet 4 inches high.

Olympian gods, spectating. In the very center, a garment is either being folded or unfolded. The garment is the peplos, the embroidered woolen robe that is presented to Athena at the Panathenaea, or "All-Athenian Festival" that marks her birthday.

- While you're taking in this scene, look above, and in the pediment, you'll see a nativity scene: the birth of Athena. But instead of a baby, she's a full-grown woman dressed in battle gear, brandishing her spear. She has emerged from the head of Zeus, which Hephaestus, the god of metalworking, has just struck with his hammer—and out popped Athena.

- On either side are the other Olympian deities. Some are turning toward the central scene; others haven't registered it yet and are looking away. All the figures—standing, sitting, reclining—perfectly conform to the shape of the pediment.

- Having examined the pediment, you reverently ascend the steps. As you enter the temple, there's a pool of reflecting water in front of a colossal statue of Athena,** some 36 feet high, dressed in gold with ivory skin. Dedicated in 438, she was the symbol of Athens and would remain so for more than 1,000 years.

- The final traces of the statue disappeared in the Middle Ages, and the copies made in the Roman period are dull and uninspiring, so you have to imagine. Athena is armed for war, staring straight ahead, her left foot slightly drawn to the side and her left hand resting on the rim of her gold shield, inside which her sacred snake coils. A winged Victory has alighted on her right hand. She wears a triple-crested helmet with a sphinx between two horses.

- The sculptures of the Parthenon, like the Parthenon itself, are supreme examples of High Classical art and architecture. Sadly, both the building and the sculptures were badly damaged in the 17th century, when the building served as an arsenal for a Turkish garrison against the invading Venetians.

** The statue of Athena resembles the chryselephantine statue of Zeus at Olympia. Both were sculpted by Phidias.

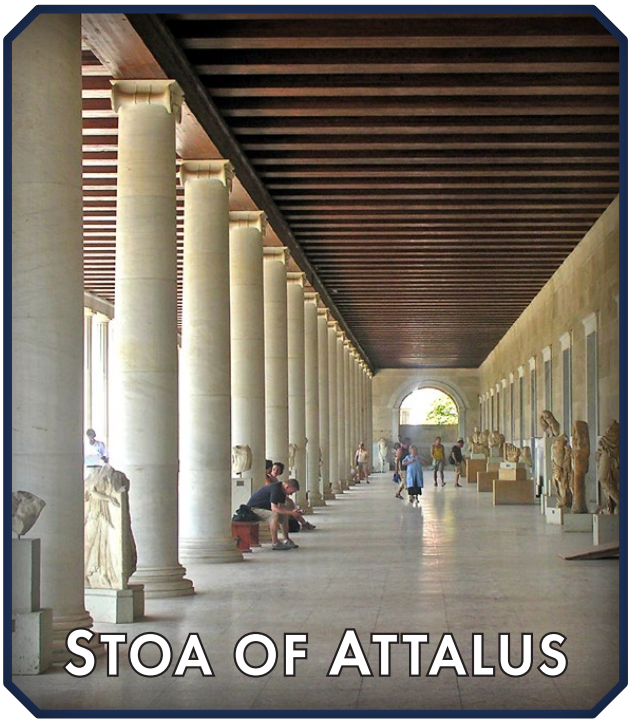
## The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

- The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, built in the 6th century, was twice the size of the Parthenon and regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was burned down in the 4th century by Herostratus, who, under torture, confessed that his motive was merely to immortalize himself. The Ephesians executed him and attempted to thwart his pathological attention seeking by making it a crime even to mention his name.

## Other Important Architectural Forms

- In addition to temples, the other type of building that architects lavished special attention on is the stoa—a long, narrow hall with an open colonnade on one side. The columns are generally 12 to 16 feet high. The walls were often decorated with paintings. One such stoa was the Stoa Poikilê, or "Painted Stoa," in the Athenian Agora, which served as the meeting place for the philosophical school known as the Stoics.

- Stoas were erected in sanctuaries, agoras, and gymnasia. They were all-purpose buildings that were intended to provide shelter from the sun and the rain. Magistrates met there, and businessmen conducted business deals inside. Many were provided with rooms that served as offices, storerooms, repositories for official documents, and shops.




- No ancient stoa has survived to roof height, but in the Agora in Athens, you can see the brilliant reconstruction, down to the last detail, of a stoa that was funded by Attalus II of Pergamum in the middle of the 2nd century BCE.

- One of the most admired buildings in the ancient world was the Arsenal, a storage facility in Athens's port city, Piraeus. It was designed by an architect named Philon in 347 BCE. It was completely destroyed when the Roman general Sulla torched the Piraeus in 86 BCE.

- Another important architectural form was that of the Greek theater. The location for a theater was determined by the availability of a convenient hillside to provide a place for spectators to sit in tiered seats, made of wood. Only exceptionally was a theater built from the ground up.

## DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

- The houses of the poor were largely indistinguishable from those of the wealthy, other than in size. Houses were made of mud brick or rubble masonry with wooden doors and wooden window frames. Floors were of beaten earth or sometimes cement. Interior walls were plastered and painted in simple colors, with red and white being preferred. Windows were small and few for practical purposes. Some houses had an upper story, as we know from literary sources, reached by a ladder.

- There was a courtyard at the back of the house. There's no evidence of separate quarters for slaves, though they may have been lodged in shacks in the courtyard. If you were relatively wealthy, your house would possess a separate women's quarters, a *gynaikonitis*, which outsiders were not permitted to enter. If your family was wealthy, you might also possess a men's quarters, known as an *andrôn*, mainly used for holding a symposium.

LECTURE 13

# The Monumentality of Greek Painting

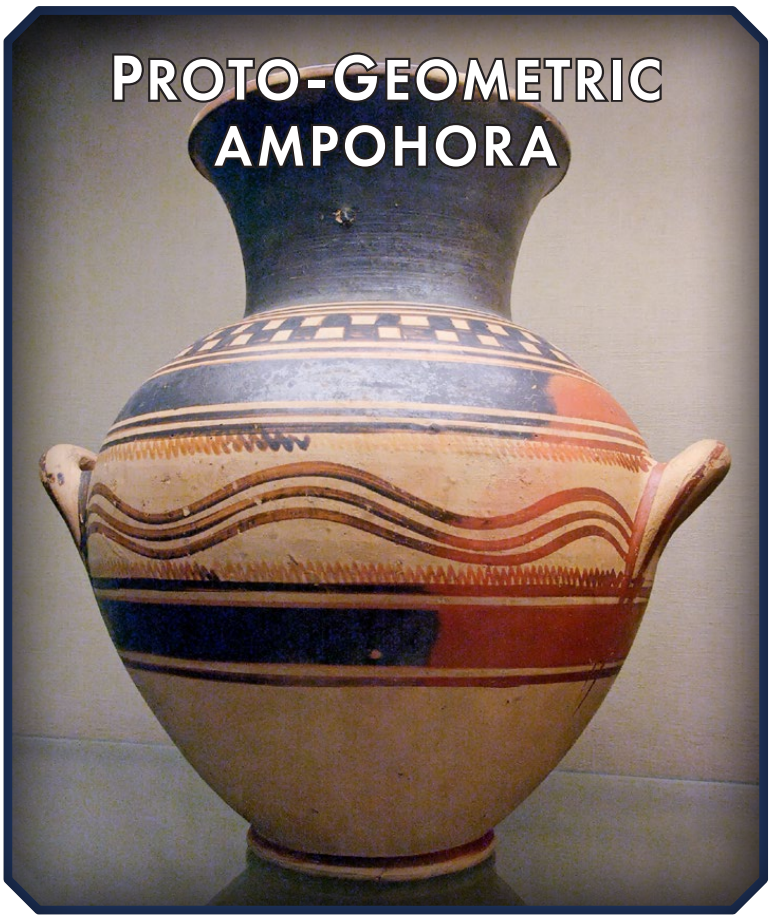
The earliest examples of painting that we have from ancient Greece are the frescoes that adorned the walls of houses at Akrotiri on Santorini, where artists had reached a high level of achievement in their ability to reproduce the human body and landscape. That painterly tradition lasted into the period of the Mycenaean takeover around 1450. By then, however, a more formalistic style had asserted itself. With the collapse of Mycenaean civilization around 1050, representational art declined. A new painterly tradition did not emerge until the 8th century BCE, and it was one that seems to have owed nothing to its predecessor. It didn't take the form of large-scale paintings.* Instead, it took the form of paintings associated with the medium of pottery, whose products were monumental in both conception and accomplishment.

* We don't hear of large-scale paintings again until much later. In fact, no large-scale paintings survive until the 4th century BCE.

# The Proto-Geometric and Geometric Styles of Pottery

- The earliest style of pottery is known as Proto-Geometric, being the predecessor to the style known as Geometric. It dates from about 1050 BCE, just when the darkness of the Dark Age was slightly beginning to brighten.

- Athens took the lead in developing the Proto-Geometric pottery style. Its perfectly regular shape was made possible by the use of a fast wheel and its perfectly even decoration by the use of multiple brushes. The decoration drew from simple geometric shapes to create an entirely abstract design, and it did so very sparingly. There were no human or animal shapes or floral decorations.




- Proto-Geometric pottery remained in favor until about 900 BCE, when it evolved into the style called Geometric. The finest achievement of the Geometric style is the so-called Dipylon vases, named after their place of discovery beside the Dipylon, or "Double Gate," on the west side of Athens in the area known as the Ceramicus, Athens's principal burial ground.

- High-class painted pottery in this period is the preferred medium through which the Greeks honor their dead, with pottery as both grave gifts and grave markers. One of the reasons why art historians know that these monumental vases served as grave markers is because their bottoms have

holes in them, which facilitated pouring drink offerings to the dead below. The fact that such vulnerable objects were left intact says much about the respectfulness of Athenians toward their dead and about the general orderliness of Athenian society.

- One of these vases, housed in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, is simply known by its accession number, NM (for National Museum) 804. It's by the greatest Geometric painter, dubbed by scholars as the Dipylon Master.† NM 804 is dated to around 750 BCE, when the Geometric style reached its height. It's a belly-handled amphora, so called because its handles rise from the belly.

- Like other monumental Geometric vases, this one was thrown onto the potter's wheel in sections, and the sections were attached to one another by a slip—the joints can be seen inside the vase. It depicts the funeral that was held in honor of a deceased woman.

NM 804

† We don't know the actual name of any Greek artist until Sophilos, who was working both as potter and painter around 580 BCE.

Belly-handled amphoras were used to commemorate women, whereas the shape known as a krater, or mixing bowl, which rested on a tall foot and had a broad body and wide mouth, served to commemorate men.

- A basic feature of the Geometric style is that the entire surface is decorated. There's little distinction between field and design. So when you look at NM 804 from afar, its surface is something of a blur because it resembles the texture of basket weaving. It's all horizontal bands of mostly geometric decoration, and on the neck of the vase there are two animal friezes, though these are hardly differentiated from the surrounding design.

- It's only when you get closer that you see that some distinction between field and design exists. In the center of the central panel are human figures—specifically, a corpse being laid out before burial with mourners gathered around. All the figures are schematized silhouettes.

- The figures look stylized to us, though the word *stylized* really describes a style of art that consciously and deliberately rejects naturalism. By contrast, the Geometric artist is striving for naturalism, and that is the direction that Greek art will pursue, albeit a kind of idealized naturalism.

NM 804

# THE PROTO-CORINTHIAN STYLE

- Almost all of the vases discussed in this lecture were produced in Athens because it was the undisputed leader in vase painting throughout almost its entire history. But there was one city—Corinth‡—that gave it a good run for its money in the early period.

- The pottery style known as Proto-Corinthian flourished from 725 to 625 BCE. It was succeeded by the Corinthian style, but Corinthian pottery was far inferior to Proto-Corinthian pottery. Proto-Corinthian corresponds to the period of Greek art that is called Orientalizing, owing to the influence of oriental (meaning Middle Eastern) art. The principal evidence of Middle Eastern influence takes the form of exotic animals.

- Proto-Corinthian vases are often tiny. A particular popular shape is the aryballos, a container for scent or oil. Housed in the British Museum, the Macmillan aryballos—which stands less than three inches high—is dated to around 640 to 630 and is named after its previous owner. The top of the vase is in the shape of a lion's head, and the liquid poured from the lion's mouth. Below are three registers of figures; the top register depicts a hoplite battle. The figures are decorated in the black-figure technique, which means that they appear as silhouettes against the clay background, the details incised with a sharp instrument.

Macmillan aryballos

‡ Corinth is situated on the narrow strip of land that joins the Peloponnese (southern Greece) to northern Greece.

# THE BLACK-FIGURE STYLE

- The black-figure technique was invented in Corinth. It was adopted by Athens toward the end of the 7th century, a full century after it had been invented in Corinth. And that was the end of it for Corinth, because the Athenian artists were so much more accomplished and inventive, and their vases began to win out in the export market. Corinthian potters even tried to ape Athenian vases by painting their pots red to resemble the red clay of Athenian vases—Corinthian clay is a sandier buff color—but all to no avail. Before long, Corinthian pottery died out.

- Animal friezes dominated Corinthian vases, but on Athenian vases, figure scenes based on mythology prevailed. A magnificent early example, dated circa 570, is the François vase, named after the archaeologist who discovered it at Chiusi, in Etruria, north of Rome, in 1844.

François vase

- Attic vases were already being widely exported in the Geometric period, and the trade greatly expanded in the 6th century. Both the potter and painter signed[§] it—Ergotimos as potter and Kleitias as painter—indicating that they took great pride in their work.

- The vase is about two feet tall, and it's a masterpiece of narrative art. It depicts 270 animal and human figures. Only the bottom frieze (i.e., the least important part of the vase) is devoted to animal and floral ornamentation. All the other friezes depict mythological scenes: four on the neck of the krater, three on the body, one on the foot, and two on each of the handles. Scenes connected with the Trojan War cycle predominate, with Achilles being the dominant figure. There are also 121 inscriptions on the vase.

- The François vase is decorated in the black-figure style—that is, black silhouettes against a red background. The black slip, or glaze, isn't a paint color. It's merely a purer and more concentrated form of clay that turns black when it's fired in the oven, or kiln. And since the red and the black are in the clay, they don't wear off with use.[¶]

- A generation after Kleitias and Ergotimos produced their masterpiece, perhaps the greatest pot painter of all time was at work. His name is Exekias, and he's both a potter and a painter. He signed 11 vases that have survived, twice as painter and potter. His command of draftsmanship is virtually unparalleled and his attention to detail equally impressive.

- An amphora that Exekias both made and painted was, like the François vase, discovered in Etruria, Italy, at a place called Vulci. It's now in the Vatican Museum. It depicts Achilles and Ajax playing a board game during a moment of relaxation during the Trojan War. They are both in battle gear, their shields with fearsome devices resting behind them. The two figures form a triangle, their backs perfectly aligned to the shape of the vase.

§ Some artists painted their own pots, but in many cases, potters collaborated with painters, with whom they worked very closely. We know the names of many of these craftsmen because from the early 6th century onward, potters and painters signed their work.

¶ In 1900, a discontented museum attendant threw a stool at the François vase and smashed it into 638 pieces. It was restored two years later and again, more accurately, in 1973.

- Exekias was highly attentive to nature. Incision, the preferred technique of black figure, was never used to greater effect, notably in the elaborately patterned cloaks both heroes wear.

- To the right of Ajax is a vertical inscription: *Onetoridês kalos*, meaning "Onetoridês is good-looking." *Kalos* inscriptions, as they are called, are found on many vases until about 450. Their purpose isn't known, but they are useful in helping us date pots.

**Although vases were manufactured all over the Greek-speaking world, Athenian potters and painters were unrivaled. Their work provides us with a glimpse of an art form whose lost large-scale works may well have rivaled the grandeur of Renaissance art.**

## The Red-Figure Style

- Around the same time that Exekias was working, in 530 or 525, a new technique, known as red figure, was invented in Athens. Red-figure vase painting reverses the composition: The figures are now in red, whereas the background is in black. Incision, by which details were added to black-figure vases, is replaced with line drawing.

- Two types of line are used: the flat line, produced by a simple wash, and the relief line, produced by a thicker application of paint that you could feel with your finger, which was used for more significant details. The use of a brush rather than incision to convey detail had a very important impact, since a brush is a much more sensitive instrument. It allows a more naturalistic rendering of anatomy and drapery.

- The red-figure style reached its peak between 500 and 470 BCE, continued for another 150 years, and finally came to an end around 320, by which time it was a pale shadow of its former self, having become prettified and decorative.

- The exemplary painter of red-figure pottery is the Berlin Painter, so named by the British art historian Sir John Beazley because there is a famous vase by him in Berlin. We don't know his real name because he didn't sign his pots, but he had a very long career and was extremely prolific.

- The Berlin amphora demonstrates how innovative and bold he was. The amphora is almost entirely covered in black glaze. Previously, it had been the custom to frame the central scene with pattern bands. On this vase, however, the figures stand isolated with virtually no decoration to detract from their central importance.

- We've come a long way from the style of the Dipylon Master, who covered virtually his entire pot with subsidiary ornamentation, leaving the central scene—the laying out of the body—effectively swamped.

- The effect on the Berlin amphora is powerful and dramatic. There is a single scene on the front and a single scene on the back of the vase. On the front are three figures superimposed on one another, creating the sense of a single contour. Foremost is a bearded Satyr, a creature that's half goat and half man, carrying a lyre; behind is the god Hermes. In between the two figures is a fawn, raising its head inquisitively as they pass by.

## White-Ground Lekythoi

- White-ground lekythoi,** or oil flasks, became the preferred Athenian grave gift in the 5th century. The term *white-ground* means that the painting on the vase is set against a white background.

- In the black- and red-figure styles, the red and the black are in the glaze, so they don't wear off with use. Paint, chiefly purple and black, is used very sparingly because it does wear away with use.

** Lekythoi were designed to hold olive oil, which was used for cooking, as body oil, as fuel for lamps, and as a base for making perfume. It was fairly costly and, for that reason, seen as a fitting gift for the dead.

- Lekythoi, however, served exclusively as grave gifts, which means they could be painted, the figures often in bright colors against a white background. This enabled a much freer style of drawing to develop, one that, in the most accomplished examples, resembles impressionism.

- There were three subjects: mythological representations of death in the form of Hermes, who conducts the dead to Hades; the laying out of the body in the home; and tomb cult, i.e., mourners visiting the tomb with gifts. One example depicts a brooding youth seated beside a tomb. The vase was painted toward the end of the Peloponnesian War. And in fact, the series comes to a close at the end of the Peloponnesian War, at the end of the 5th century.

LECTURE 14

# Homer's Humanity: The Epic Experience

It's often said that the poems of Homer are the nearest thing the Greeks had to a Bible. That's off base in many ways but accurate in two respects: because his works had a status in the eyes of the Greeks that is comparable to that of the Bible, and because it was largely Homer who gave the Greeks their idea of the Olympian deities as anthropomorphic beings with emotions just like human ones.

# Homer's Epic Poems

- The poems of Homer are among the first surviving Greek literary productions.* There were lots of would-be poets composing stories based around the Trojan War cycle when Homer was putting together his epic poems. But they haven't survived—or, rather, only in fragments. That's because later Greeks didn't think they were worth preserving.

- Homer's poems are the greatest product of the Dark Age, specifically the period around 700. Homer's genius was to create two unified works of incomparable literary worth out of a patchwork tradition. Rhapsodes—meaning literally "someone who stitches verses together"—had been circulating around the Greek world for centuries before Homer, creating a very vital oral tradition, based to a large degree on improvised recitation.

- The oral tradition was nostalgic: It evoked a time when Greece could field a vast military, powerful aristocrats held sway, and wealth abounded. It was a tradition born out of impoverishment, a sense of loss and decline, and perhaps a deep sense of failure. And it was that oral tradition that lies at the root of the *Iliad*† and the *Odyssey*.‡

- Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are highly sophisticated literary productions. Both begin in medias res, or in the middle of the action, as the Roman poet Horace observed. The *Iliad* covers a period of 10 days in the 10th year of the war. Books IV through XII of the *Odyssey*, depicting the adventures of Odysseus, are in the form of a flashback. Though the *Iliad* doesn't use flashback, it frequently looks outside its temporal frame.

* The Homeric poems didn't emerge from nothing. There are obvious borrowings from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, whose origins date to circa 2600 BCE.

† Recommended for reading the *Iliad* is Caroline Alexander's translation, which is informed by the antiwar theme that runs through the poem.

‡ Recommended for reading the *Odyssey* is Emily Wilson's translation, which has a very modern feel, despite being in iambic pentameter verse (the meter that Shakespeare used).

## What is epic poetry?

An epic is a very lengthy narrative poem. Length is important because it enables the working through of a grand theme over a period of time.

~

It's written in a meter known as dactylic hexameter. The dactyl is a metrical unit consisting of a long (stressed) syllable followed by two short (unstressed) syllables, or it can be resolved into two long syllables, called a spondee.

~

Epic adopts a self-consciously elevated style: There are no colloquialisms and few brief exchanges of dialogue, and the language is inherently serious.

~

The theme is truly epic in scale and intensity: It's about great events, great men, great achievements, and great mistakes.

~

There's usually a journey that is undertaken by the central figure in the story, in the course of which he has to make discoveries about himself and the world around him—discoveries that are often very painful.

~

The gods play a major part in the action. They don't run the entire show, but they are interested in the final outcome, and they sporadically assist or hinder the hero in his objectives.

~

Epic says something profound about humanity's place in the universe, the human relationship with the gods, human frailty and ignorance, and human courage and determination.

# Homer's Identity

- Nothing is known for certain about Homer, although there's a tradition that he was blind. That tradition may be based either on his portrait of the blind bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey* or on the belief that his poetic genius compensated for his blindness, like Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, and Andrea Bocelli. Or both reasons may contribute.

- Collectively, we assume Homer was a man. However, the Victorian writer Samuel Butler wrote a book published in 1897 called *The Authoress of the "Odyssey."* Butler based this claim on the fact that the poem is full of strong-willed women who dictate the terms of Odysseus's return home, including the goddess Athena, the nymph Calypso, the witch Circe, and his wife Penelope—who holds things altogether on Ithaca during Odysseus's 20-year absence by deceiving a whole army of suitors, 108 in total, thereby ensuring that he has a wife and property to return to.

- Some scholars, called the Analysts, dispute Homer's existence altogether. They believe that the poems are a patchwork stitched by many hands. The Analysts are distinguished from the Unitarians, who believe the opposite: that the poems are a unified composition. The study of Homer's identity, or identities, is known as the Homeric Question, and it goes back to antiquity.

- Since the middle of the 20th century, the emphasis has been on comprehending how the poems have their roots in the oral tradition through the identification of what are called formulas: phrases and in some cases whole passages that are repeated, suggesting that the poems were stitched together by some sort of editorial process.

- Then there's the question, if you believe in single rather than multiple authorship, of whether the *Odyssey* was composed by the same author as the *Iliad*. We also don't know whether Homer was literate, though we do know that he (or she, or they) was (or were) aware of writing, because there's a reference to writing in the *Iliad*.

# THE *ILIAD*

- The world of the Homeric poems is that of an idealized past.[§] It's a world where aristocratic values prevail. It's centered around the concept of *timê*, "a sense of one's personal worth as reflected in society as a whole." Its opposite is *aidôs*, "shame." That's why Achilles gets so irate at the beginning of the *Iliad* when Agamemnon robs him of the captive girl Briseis, who was handed to him as a token of appreciation for his prowess. In other words, she was the visible proof of his *timê*.

- Through the character of Achilles, Homer takes us on a spiritual journey to self-realization. It's a journey we all undertake in different ways. The argument that Achilles has with Agamemnon is an argument that any young person might have with authority—an authority that is corrupt and self-serving.

- Achilles makes the illuminating discovery that we don't live in a just world. He's devastated by that discovery. Being young, he's an idealist. He believes that talent should be rewarded proportionately. And when Agamemnon publicly insults him, Achilles withdraws to his tent and sulks. Achilles gets his mother, Thetis, to persuade Zeus to throw his support behind him by proving that the Greeks are useless without him. Achilles is absent from the poem for seven books, and then in Book IX, Agamemnon sends an embassy to try to persuade him to return.

- And this is when we learn that Achilles has been thinking hard about life. He's had the first of three epiphanies. He's discovered that society's value system is not upheld; therefore, diligence is pointless. "What's the point of being a hard worker?" he demands. "It all comes to nothing in the end."

§ The world that the poems describe was one of wealth and power, and unity. The world in which the poems' origins lie—the world that the bards inhabited, not the world that they imagined—was one of poverty, isolation, and disunity.

- While Achilles is having this existential crisis, we are to imagine that thousands of his compatriots die. Achilles doesn't care about this, but his dear friend Patroclus does care. Patroclus sees his wounded companions and feels compassion for them. So he persuades Achilles to lend him his armor so that the Trojans will think that Achilles has returned to the fray.

- Achilles agrees but warns him not to scale the walls. He doesn't want Patroclus to rob him of his glory. He's still caught up in the concern for his status and recognition. Patroclus joins the fray and tries to scale the walls, whereupon Hector, the most valiant of the Trojans, strikes him down.

- Achilles now has his second epiphany. He discovers that his attempt to enforce society's value system has directly caused the death of his dearest friend. He's devastated with grief—though not guilt, which didn't feature prominently in Greek culture and wasn't part of Achilles's makeup.

- Achilles returns to the battle, goes on a killing spree, and kills Hector. But even now his rage is not satisfied. He drags Hector's body, attached to the wheels of his chariot, around the walls of Troy under the gaze of Hector's parents.

- And then, Achilles has his third revelation. He comes face-to-face with Hector's father, King Priam, who has risked his life passing through the Greek lines so that he can beg Achilles for the return of his son's mutilated body.

- When Priam slips into Achilles's tent unobserved by the Greek army, Priam grasps both of Achilles's hands—"the man-slaying hands of so many of his sons," as Homer pointedly reminds us—and they weep in each other's arms. Achilles is reminded of his elderly father, Peleus, back in Greece, whom he will never see again. Each of them is reduced, or rather elevated, to his essence as father and son, all hatred swept aside. Achilles has discovered that we are all fathers and sons.

- It's a desperately human encounter. It's about seeing the world through someone else's eyes—through the eyes of the person you hate most in the world. Humanistic discourse at its best is about building a humane society, a society that is heterogeneous in inclination, pluralistic in composition, and imaginative in essence.

- The *Iliad*, which begins with a picture of rotting corpses strewn over the battlefield, presents an antiwar theme. The Trojan War¶ was a stupid war that should never have been fought, like so many wars throughout history. Neither the Greeks nor the Trojans could talk about defying the tyrant or give themselves any justification for the war, other than pigheaded pride.

- Throughout the *Iliad*, we see the Trojans as family members just like ourselves and the Greeks as barbarized by virtue of their removal from familial bonds. We experience the action of the *Iliad* very much through the eyes of the enemy—or, more precisely, through the eyes of its victims: Hector (the most decent man in the entire poem), Andromache, Astyanax, Priam, and Hecuba. It is the enemy who consistently clamor for our empathetic attention.

- This, therefore, is no national epic; there's nothing admirable about any of the Greeks. The *Iliad* is a hymn to truth. Priam and Achilles achieve reconciliation, but it is only temporary. And though a cessation of hostilities is arranged for the Trojans to bury Hector, it will be business as usual immediately afterward. The Trojans even set guards around the tomb in case the Greeks violate the truce. So the death of Hector presages the fall of Troy, and the poem ends on a note of edgy tension.

¶ The Trojan War was Greece's epic struggle of revenge against an act of aggression, yet there's precious little that a Greek can feel proud of. Was the war worth it? Was the destruction of Troy justified? These were questions Homer asked and that the Greeks would continue to ask for centuries.

*Priam and his Family Mourning the Death of Hector*, Etienne Barthélemy Garnier

## THE *ODYSSEY*

- The *Iliad*, as much as any work ever written, is a meditation on death, mortality, and loss. It's about Achilles's profound psychological journey. Odysseus, of course, also goes on a journey; our adoption of the word *odyssey* indicates that. He voyages from Troy by a highly circuitous route back home to Ithaca. But he also undertakes a journey in self-definition.

- As a human being, Odysseus is everything that the fabulous peoples he meets are not. Whereas the Cyclopes don't observe the law and live by themselves, Odysseus lives in a community and observes the rule of law. Whereas Calypso is immortal and ageless, Odysseus is married to a mortal, aging woman. Whereas the Phaeacians live a life of ease, Odysseus, like every human being, must struggle.

- Odysseus's son Telemachus also goes on a journey. In the first four books, Telemachus journeys from Ithaca to the Peloponnese (southern Greece) in search of news of his father. But Telemachus is also undertaking a journey of self-realization—of maturation, because in undertaking a physical journey, he must confront the adult world.

- But whereas the *Iliad* has a tragic vision, the *Odyssey* has a romantic one. It's also a more reassuring, more familiar, and more just world. At the end of the poem, Odysseus is reunited with his wife and son, and the suitors, along with the faithless domestic slaves who sided with the suitors, have all been killed.

- At the same time, the *Odyssey* is infused with the sense of a world on the wane. The theory that it was economic and cultural decline that led to the collapse of the Mycenaean world and ushered in the Dark Age is mirrored in the story of Odysseus's homecoming.

- What Homer offers us, both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, is a critique of the heroic code—a code that is based on the belief that winning fame, especially on the battlefield, is what life is all about. What unfolds in both poems is the fact that the heroic code doesn't actually work.

- What we get in the *Iliad* is an emphasis on the pathos and wastage of war and on the plight of innocent victims. And what we get in the *Odyssey* is a new kind of hero, one who is intent on survival at any price and whose attachment to life outweighs his attachment to the heroic code.

## READINGS

Homer, *The Iliad*.

———, *The Odyssey*.

Nicolson, *Why Homer Matters*.

Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, ch. 3.

LECTURE 15

# Greek Theater: Producing and Staging Plays

Probably most people's idea of Greek tragedy is one of actors dressed in long robes waving their arms about melodramatically and the chorus delivering its lines in a singsong voice. When directors try to put on a Greek tragedy in a way that they think is true to ancient production and acting techniques, sometimes the result is that it does look somewhat artificial. One reason for that is because contemporary actors just don't have the vocal range of their classical forebears. Another is that the music and the choreography are lost. As a result, the actors look wooden, while the chorus stands around much of the time trying not to look totally useless.

# The Birth and Rise of Theater

- Drama originated with communal agricultural routines, such as threshing or treading grapes, which became much more endurable when people sang and performed the steps together. So that's what they did. And of course, there had to be a leader. And sometimes the leader would address the others—let's call them the chorus—and thus some sort of exchange between chorus and leader could take place.

- For a long time, there was just the chorus and the chorus leader. And what they sung about might be a hymn to the gods or a well-known story. There probably was a lot of improvisation, but in time, set rhythms and perhaps set melodies established themselves.

- Then, later, someone invented the concept of the actor*—the person who pretended to be someone else—and theater was born. And then later still, the tragic playwright Aeschylus came up with the idea of having a second actor, leading to dialogue between two characters. And even later, Sophocles came up with the idea of having a third actor.

- There were never more than three actors, the leading one called the *prôtagonistês*, or "protagonist." It was around this character chiefly that the drama focused. And since the actors, like the chorus, all wore masks, they could play several parts. That is testimony to their vocal versatility and perhaps physical versatility, as an actor might go from playing a young woman to an old man in a few minutes.

- The Greeks never dispensed with the chorus. It was always a major part of every play, even though it became increasingly irrelevant to the plotline. The chorus sometimes sets the scene, points out a moral, or communicates a conventional view of religion, which basically boils down to doing nothing that might offend the gods.

* The word for actor in Greek is *hupocritês*, which gives us *hypocrite*. A hypocrite, like an actor, is someone who pretends to be what he or she is not. But in Greek, the word *hupocritês* carried no such negative connotation.

- All the actors and all the members of the chorus were men. Perhaps it would have been regarded as indecorous to see a woman on stage. In fact, there's no evidence to indicate that women (or children) were even permitted to attend the theater.

- How did Greek drama make it from the village threshing floor to the slopes of the Acropolis and being incorporated into one of Athens's two foremost festivals? We don't know for certain, but most likely this took place around 530 BCE during the reign of a tyrant named Pisistratus, who had made it one of his goals to elevate Athens to the level of cultural leader in the Greek world.

- Legend has it that the first playwright to present a tragedy at the Greek festival called the Great Dionysia was Thespis—from whom the word *thespian*, meaning "actor," originates. If this theory is correct, and there really isn't any other, Pisistratus deserves a lot of credit. He was a true visionary. He recognized the potential of tragedy (comedy was invented later) and incorporated it into the festival of Dionysus.† He made it a source of national pride, worthy of everyone's attention, as well as worthy of being funded at considerable public expense.

## Greek Theater

- A Greek theater consisted of two main elements: *orchēstra* and *theatron*. *Orchēstra* means "dancing space" and was the place occupied by the chorus, who remained on stage from their entry until the end of the play, while actors entered and exited. *Theatron* means "seeing space," the space where the audience sat. There was also a wooden building, the *skênê*, facing the orchestra. This is where the actors changed costumes. It was painted to resemble something like a palace or a temple to serve as a backdrop—hence the word *scene*.

† Why Dionysus, god of wine? Aristotle claims that drama began with a form of choral lyric sung in honor of Dionysus known as a dithyramb. Also, Dionysus enables his worshipers to achieve *ecstasy*, which comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, which means "standing outside yourself." You stand outside yourself when you drink wine and get drunk and also when you act. But the plays themselves—their content—had no specific connection with Dionysus.

The best-preserved theater in Greece is the theater at Epidaurus. It was built in the 4th century BCE and is almost perfectly preserved because of a landslide that covered it soon after it was finished.

- It probably wasn't until the 4th century BCE that a raised stage was introduced. The Theater of Dionysus‡ in Athens was a hollow cut into the southeast flank of the Acropolis. This was where the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (and of the comic dramatist Aristophanes) were performed.

- The tragedians had to submit three tragedies and a satyr play for consideration by a magistrate called the eponymous archon.§ By contrast, the comic playwrights had to submit just one play. The eponymous magistrate would read them and then deliver his verdict. Three tragedians and three comic dramatists would then have their plays selected and financed.

‡ Plato's dialogue *Symposium* says that the Theater of Dionysus could accommodate 30,000, but the archaeological evidence suggests the audience was considerably smaller—more like 17,000.

§ This title refers to the fact that he was the magistrate who gave his name to the year.

- People couldn't go to the theater any time they wanted. And theatergoing was a serious matter. People arrived at dawn and stayed all day. Each of the three days, people sat and watched for perhaps six hours on end, presumably with short bathroom breaks between. Each day featured three tragedies and one satyr play—a play starring Satyrs, half-human, half-goat creatures who got blind drunk and chased after women. And then at the end of the day, there would be one comedy.

- There were only two times a year when you could watch plays: in late January/early February at the Lenaea festival and in late March/early April at the City Dionysia, another name for the Great Dionysia. Some demes in Attica had theaters, but the productions would have been very modest compared with those of the state festivals. It wasn't until the 4th century that the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were regularly revived. But no play ever had what we would call a run.

- A lot of money went into these festivals. Each of the productions was sponsored by a superrich Athenian known as a *chorêgos*, who footed the bill either for three tragedies and a satyr or for one comedy. As his title suggests, he paid for the costumes and the pay of the chorus, and probably for the flute player who accompanied the chorus. The protagonist, however, was paid for by the state.

- At a conservative estimate, 1,346 individuals were involved in putting on plays in any one year. At some point, 10 judges known as *kritai*, our word *critics*, were also appointed, one from each of the 10 tribes. They may have been appointed by lot; there's no evidence that they were expected to have any theatrical experience.

- Tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays adhere strictly to a set of conventions. All begin with a prologue, after which the chorus enters, singing and dancing. There are a number of episodes—i.e., spoken verse between two or three characters—interrupted by stasima, or choral passages, again sung and danced. The chorus is always the last to leave. No violence takes place on stage (or perhaps only very rarely). The stage was never empty. Only rarely was there a scene change. There was no curtain or blackouts. There were no stage directions, or at least dramatists didn't provide them in their texts.

- Since the playwright not only wrote the play but also wrote the music and choreographed the chorus, he had to possess a formidable range of talents. And in the early days, the playwright was sometimes the protagonist, or main actor, too, which means he had to have acting skills.

- At the end of the contest, when each of the tragedians had performed their four plays and each of the comic playwrights their one play, the *kritai* voted, probably by writing the plays in order of preference on a tablet. The tablets were placed in an urn, and then the eponymous archon, who originally selected which playwrights should be funded, drew out just five, leaving the selection up to Dionysus.

- Both the playwright and the *chorêgos*, or sponsor, were awarded first, second, or third prize—the prize was a crown of ivy. There was also a prize for acting. After the victors had been announced, celebrations followed, no doubt involving lots of wine.

- It's often said that everybody knew the stories already because they were based on familiar myths and that all the dramatists were free to do was tell a well-known story in their own words. But like mythology, there was no canonical edition of myths. They were all, to a large extent, free-floating.

## How Greek Drama Survived

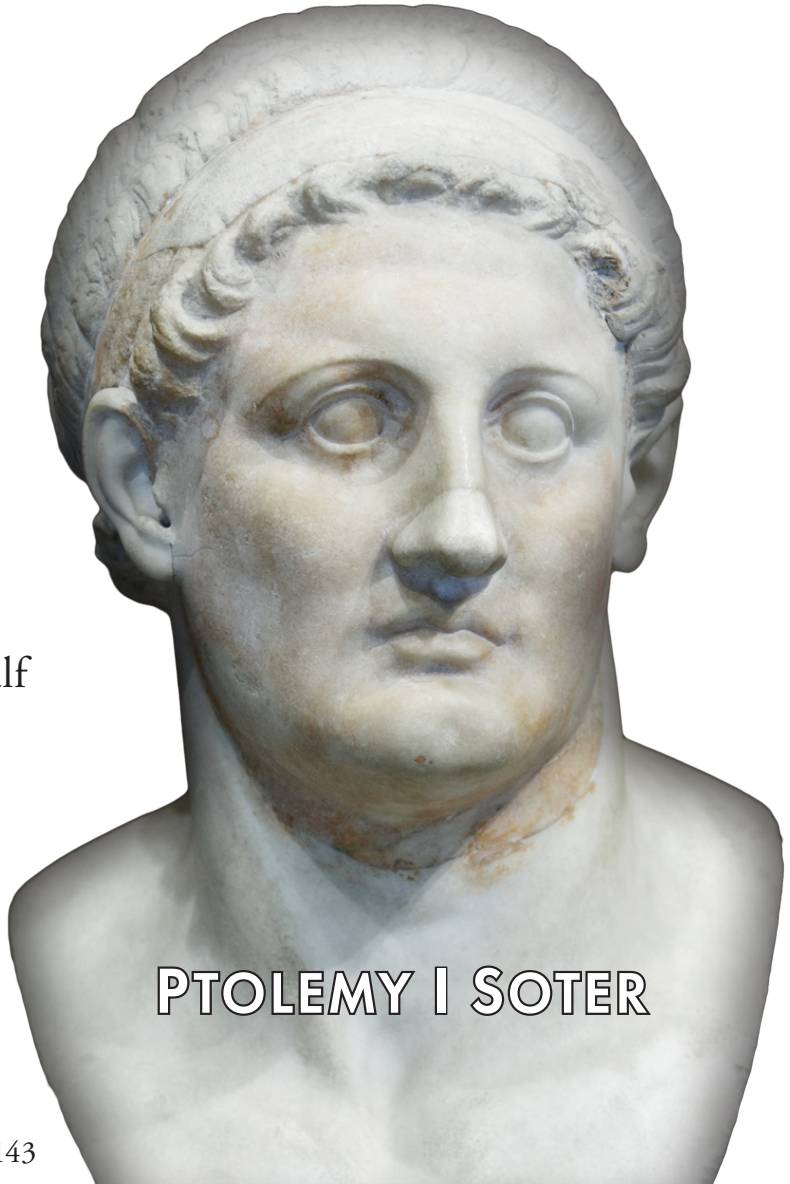
- Only plays written by Athenians have survived. But by 300 BCE, Greek theater had become a truly Panhellenic—i.e., all-Greek—enterprise, with plays being performed all over the Greek-speaking world, particularly in southern Italy and Sicily.

- In the 4th century BCE the three greats—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—achieved canonical status. That meant their plays were regularly revived. It also meant that, for the first time, the Athenians established an authoritative version of the plays that have survived.

- Enter either Ptolemy II or III—we don't exactly know which. The Ptolemies ruled Egypt and were the descendants of one of the generals of Alexander the Great, Ptolemy I Soter. Alexander the Great founded Alexandria, which was the home of the greatest library of the ancient world. And Ptolemy was a bibliophile. He passed a law that every ship that docked at Alexandria had to be inspected to see if there were any rolls—the ancient equivalent of books—that he didn't have in the library. He'd then have the roll copied and the original returned to its owner.

- Ptolemy committed a brazen act of theft: He told the Athenians that if they would lend him the authoritative copies of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, he would have his scribes copy them and return the originals to the Athenians, and as evidence of his good word, he lodged 15 talents (a vast sum) as a deposit while the plays were being copied. But once his scribes had copied the rolls, he gave the Athenians the copies, kept the originals, and forfeited the deposit.

- The Library of Alexandria was founded in 295 BCE by Ptolemy I, and it became a center of learning for men of letters and science from all over the Greek-speaking world. It was the first institution in the history of Western civilization to dedicate itself to the preservation of knowledge. It was also the place where literary criticism began. A Byzantine scholar named John Tzetzes says that the library contained nearly half a million rolls.


PTOLEMY I SOTER

- There are various accounts of how it was destroyed. Julius Caesar may have accidentally burned it down when he invaded Egypt.

- Fortunately, by the middle of the 1st century BCE, there were other libraries in existence, and the Western literary canon was preserved—well, a small part of it. In fact, we have just a fraction of what the Greeks wrote. The oldest surviving manuscript of Greek tragedy is *Mediceus Laurentianus 32.9*, written around 950 AD—1400 years after the tragedians died. Other manuscripts of Greek tragedy, 150 in all, date from the 12th to the 15th century.¶

- Most surviving tragedies derive from a lost standard school edition, which was compiled in the late 2nd century CE by a Byzantine schoolmaster (or perhaps schoolmasters). The edition contained seven plays of Aeschylus, seven of Sophocles, and 10 of Euripides. The first printed edition, by Aldine Press, came out in 1502.

- The earliest translations of Greek drama were made in Latin at the beginning of the 16th century by Erasmus. Later, they were translated into French, Italian, Spanish, and then German. It wasn't until the 18th century that the plays were first translated into English.

**How confident can we be that we have the words that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote? What changes did actors perhaps make after a first performance? We'll never know.**

- The Athenians also wrote comedies. Only one comic playwright has survived, however: Aristophanes. And though he's a great poet, his plays are performed far less frequently to modern audiences. There are two chief reasons for this. First, unlike the tragedies, which are set in the timeless past, the comedies are set in 5th- or 4th-century Athens, make constant references to contemporary events, and require at least some basic understanding of Greek history. Second, the comedies are obscene; for instance, the male actors and male choruses wear gigantic phalluses.

¶ This is why in a Greek text you see at the bottom of each page abbreviated notes in Latin citing variant readings in different manuscripts. Scholars over the centuries have tested their acumen by proposing their own suggestions as to what the author actually wrote instead of what is preserved in the manuscript tradition.

LECTURE 16

# Greek Drama: Laughter and Tears

Learning about individual Greek dramas can help us understand why today they are performed virtually all over the world. Greek tragedy has come down to us by the narrowest of arteries. Sophocles wrote more than 120 tragedies and only seven have survived, and almost the same margin is true of Aeschylus and Euripides. And even though the comedies of Aristophanes are rarely performed today because they're too specific to the time in which they were written, Greek comedy is equally sublime and of perennial significance.

For more information about Greek drama, check out the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk.

## Aeschylus's Tragedies

- While 33 tragedies have survived, Aeschylus's great tragedy the *Oresteia* is our only surviving trilogy. No text in the Western canon explores with more insight the fact that we inhabit a universe that does not neatly divide right from wrong. Rather, it is one of moral complexity, where the scales are often pretty evenly balanced.

- In the first play, *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra kills her husband in revenge for his sacrificing her daughter. This means that her son Orestes finds himself in the exquisitely painful position of having to avenge his father's death by murdering his mother—his predicament in *Libation Bearers*, the second play in the trilogy. In the third and final play, the *Eumenides*, Orestes heads to Athens, where trial by jury is established for the first time. The jury is split down the middle, and it's left to the goddess Athena to cast the deciding vote in favor of his acquittal.

- At the end of the *Eumenides*, the Furies, the ghastly spirits that pursue the guilty, enraged by the fact that Orestes has been acquitted, are given an official cult in Athens by Athena in one of the great harmonizing moments in Western literature. Their incorporation indicates that cultural progress—the establishment of trial by jury—doesn't eliminate the need to venerate something primeval: the sense of guilt and the desire for vengeance.

- When Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound** begins, Hephaestus, the god of metalworking, is chaining Prometheus to a rock so that his innards will be pecked away by vultures each day, while his wounds heal by night. This is Prometheus's punishment from Zeus for having stolen fire from Mount

* Some scholars dispute the fact that *Prometheus Bound* is by Aeschylus, but if it isn't by him, it's by a poet of considerable stature.

Olympus and giving it to humans and also for having taken away their ability to see into the future—both of which Zeus resented, preferring humans to suffer.

- Prometheus is utterly unrepentant and vows revenge. On the one hand, he's heroic and admirable and compassionate, and on the other, he serves as a terrible warning of the penalty for infringing divine law.

- Here, again, we inhabit the gray area between right and wrong. Do we side with Zeus or Prometheus? Zeus is a tyrant, but Prometheus has exceeded the bounds of moderation. In other words, we're deadlocked.

- The latter two plays in the trilogy haven't survived, but we know that Prometheus was eventually released, though how the playwright brought this about is a mystery.

*What is the point of tragedy? Why watch or read misery?*

Aristotle suggests that tragedy is therapeutic: It gets us to experience pity and fear, and as a result of this, our emotions are purified, or cleansed.

## Sophocles's Tragedies

- Sophocles's *Antigone*† is set in the immediate aftermath of a civil war. The issue at the heart of the play is whether a corpse should be buried. Creon, the new ruler, has just issued a proclamation denying burial to his nephew Polyneices, who was killed by his brother Eteocles in a failed attempt to seize the throne. This decision is opposed by his niece Antigone, who performs a symbolic burial of her brother and is arrested by the guards and brought before Creon.

† The play has featured prominently in modern adaptations. Audience reaction to *Antigone* by the French playwright Jean Anouilh, first performed in 1944, was to see Antigone both as a symbol of the French Resistance in World War II and as an apologist for Nazism.

- The clash between Antigone and Creon divides right down the center: It's male versus female, private versus public, divine law versus secular law, the living versus the dead, the good of the individual versus the good of the state, and the welfare of the state versus obligations to family. What it's not about is right versus wrong.

- It's easy to sympathize with Antigone, who is condemned to death for her action, and all the more so as she appeals to a modern audience as a kind of proto-feminist. She takes on the male establishment single-handedly and brings it down.

- But we need to take into account Creon's vulnerability as newly appointed king in the aftermath of a civil war. And let's note that Antigone not only causes the downfall of Creon but also the deaths of her fiancé and his mother, both of whom commit suicide. And is Thebes, racked with division, any better off at the end of the play as a result of her supposed heroism?

- Sophocles has produced an exquisitely insoluble dilemma. And though the subject of the play is the right of burial of a human being, that issue is symptomatic of the polarizing effect of any deeply polarizing political issue in any society.

- In Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus is condemned before the play begins—actually, before he's born—to kill his father and marry his mother. He's entirely guiltless, although, you might say, once he found out the prophecy, he should have avoided killing anyone and should have remained a bachelor all his life. But that's not the point. And besides, the prophecy wasn't conditional.

- The point is that Oedipus's doggedness is what brings his crimes to light. If he hadn't pursued his father's killer so vigorously, he would have lived in ignorance of his crimes. But he is remorseless in his search for the truth, which is what makes him admirable.

- On a deeper level, it's a play about the search for one's identity, and then, on having discovered the awful truth, going on living with that truth. Unlike his mother Jocasta, who can't bear the truth and hangs herself, Oedipus accepts who he is, albeit having blinded himself. And now that he is sightless, he has finally acquired insight.

- *Oedipus the King* is the first murder mystery in the Western canon, albeit with a very original twist: The detective, Oedipus, is, unknown to himself, the murderer, since he has no awareness of the fact that the old man he slew on the road was either his father or the king of Thebes, even though it just so happened that the throne had recently become vacant and the queen widowed. At the heart of the play is the terrible power of coincidence—and the inscrutable will of the gods.

- At the very end of his life, Sophocles wrote a follow-up play about Oedipus called *Oedipus at Colonus*.‡ Oedipus in this play is old and blind and beaten down, but not out. He's dependent on the support of his daughter Antigone. But there's a mysterious quality about him.

- In the course of the play, various people gather around him, mostly for their own purposes, because they know that when he dies, his bones will be powerful in the vicinity of his grave. One of those who seeks him out is his son Polyneices, who begs for his help.

- Oedipus in response trashes him. He hurls abuse at him for abandoning him in his hour of need. The only person he respects is Theseus, Athens's king, who receives him into the community as a suppliant. In return, Oedipus promises that he will assist Athens in the future when Athens is at war with Thebes. But Theseus protests that Thebes is their ally. And then Oedipus delivers one of the greatest speeches in all of tragedy—about the changes that are wrought by time, whereby faith dissolves and faithlessness is born.

‡ Colonus was a sacred grove just outside of Athens.

- At the end of the play, after Oedipus has been summoned by a divine voice, Theseus returns to describe Oedipus's passing (he doesn't actually die in the conventional sense). Theseus reports the divine voice, saying, "Oedipus, we must move on."

- And when Oedipus learns of the prophecy that he will become important, he says in mystification, "So, when I am nothing, then I am a man?" Oedipus grows in stature and self-confidence as the play progresses until he exits—no longer dependent on another human being—to meet his end.

Tragedy isn't a universal medium. On the contrary, it has only flourished in very specific periods of history: 5th-century BCE Athens and beyond, 1st-century CE Rome, Elizabethan and Jacobean England, and 20th-century America.

## Euripides's Tragedies

- Euripides is decidedly edgy. It's difficult not to think that some of his plays aren't criticisms of the Athenians—hence the tradition, which may be true, that he was exiled from Athens in consequence.

- Euripides's *Trojan Women* was written at the time of the Peloponnesian War. There is no more devastating antiwar play in the canon, since its topic is crimes against humanity. The Trojan women of the title are all captives of the Greeks and are facing the prospect of a life of sexual servitude. In the course of the play, the Greek herald Talthybius keeps showing up with more and more bad news about their fate.

- Euripides's *Medea* is one of the most controversial Greek tragedies.§ It explores the mindset of a betrayed and rejected woman. Medea is married to Jason, whom she assisted in his endeavor to steal the Golden Fleece, and when her father pursued Jason, Medea dismembered her brother's body and tossed the parts into the sea. Each time her father saw a part, he would order his ship to stop to retrieve it, and in that way, she and Jason escaped.

- Even though Jason owes Medea for what she did for him, he has found that he can do better than be married to a semi-barbarian foreigner, so he's leaving her for someone better. And this is going to improve their children's prospects in life, he explains to Medea, when he announces he's leaving her.

- Medea pretends to go along with it all and presents Jason's bride-to-be with a beautiful robe. When the bride puts it on, however, it begins devouring her flesh, and when her father tries to save her, he is also devoured by the poison.

- But Medea's desire for vengeance isn't sated. She now murders their children.¶ In the end, a deus ex machina in the form of Aegeus, king of Athens, arrives and rescues Medea in his airborne chariot.

> Tragedy speaks to the raw reality of human existence. Tragedy's common currency is the worst we are capable of imagining; it's the only speech we have for what is otherwise unspeakable.

§ Even though scholars in the past have described Euripides as a misogynist because of his unsparing portrayals of women, his *Medea* has been a beacon for women's rights and feminism from the 19th century onward.

¶ All of these terrible things take place offstage, though the audience would have likely heard bloodcurdling cries.

- Euripides wrote the *Bacchae* at the end of his life. The play offers a damning verdict on the workings of the divine. It begins with a prologue in which Dionysus, a kind of missionary for his own cult, arrives in Thebes and announces that he's going to punish its king, Pentheus, for having denied his divinity. The play revolves around the issue of the strength of the temporal opposition to Dionysus's claims, which Pentheus sees as dangerous to the security of the state.

- At its heart is a scene often referred to as the cat-and-mouse scene, in which Dionysus lures Pentheus into dressing up as a woman so that he can pretend to be one of the Bacchae, the female devotees of Dionysus, and watch what they do. It's arguably the most macabre scene in all of Greek tragedy because Dionysus plays on Pentheus's weak spot: his voyeuristic desire to spy on women. It results in the dismemberment of Pentheus by the Bacchae, led by Pentheus's own mother and aunt, who, in an ecstasy of religious fervor, tear him limb from limb in the deluded belief that he is a lion cub.

- Euripides isn't passing a judgment on Dionysus per se. Pentheus pays the price, as we all must, for denying not only a god but that force that he represents. Toward the end of the play, Pentheus's grandfather Cadmus delivers this overpowering line: "Gods should be wiser than humans." But the action of the play demonstrates conclusively that they have other priorities than wisdom.

## Aristophanes's Comedies

- Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* was written in, and is set in, the Peloponnesian War. The year is 411, and Athens has been at war with Sparta off and on for 20 years. The women are sick of the war and want to bring it to an end, so they decide, under the leadership of Lysistrata, to go on a sex strike.

- Aristophanes has a lot of fun showing how the men are, to put it mildly, discomfited. (You can imagine the visual humor when you keep in mind that all the men wore giant artificial phalluses.) In the end, the men can't bear their discomfort any longer, so the two sides are reconciled. And then everyone gets drunk—a common ending to many plays by Aristophanes. The play is an escapist fantasy, but it's one that is tinged with more than a hint of the desire for a better world.

- Equally high fantastical is Aristophanes's *Women Attending the Assembly*, which imagines a world in which women run the state. And though this is also an escapist fantasy, it may have provoked some Athenians to question whether the world would be a better place if it were run by women.

## READINGS

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other Plays*.

Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays*.

Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*.

Storey and Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*.

LECTURE 17

# Greek Politics, Law, and Public Speaking

The boldest political experiment ever undertaken was the introduction of radical, participatory democracy in Athens in the middle of the 5th century—not the watered-down version of democracy we have today. It was based on full, unsparing, unwavering confidence in the common man. It was flawed, of course, but it was also hugely impressive.

# Athenian Democracy

- When Greece began to emerge from the Dark Ages, a system akin to monarchy prevailed in most communities, though it probably took rather different forms. In some Greek communities—notably Sparta, Thessaly, and Macedonia—some form of kingship persisted into the Classical and even Hellenistic era. In most places, however, it was superseded by aristocracy, and in some places—most notably, of course, in Athens—by democracy.

- There seems to have been something in the Greek cultural bloodstream that found unregulated power abhorrent. We see that already in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which indicate that democratic debate was already operational at the time the poems were composed, in the late 8th or early 7th century BCE.

- The roots of Athenian democracy go back at least as far as the early years of the 6th century BCE. They're associated with a shadowy figure named Solon, who is often referred to as the father of democracy. Much of what we know about him derives from the poetry he wrote—that was how he advertised his political manifesto.

- Solon was an economic, social, and political innovator. One of his most important measures was the cancellation of debts, which had led to the enslavement of Athenians by fellow Athenians—a practice he abolished. He also established regular meetings of the Assembly of all citizens.

Politics and law are deeply—indeed, inextricably—interconnected. The kind of political system we have is directly related to the kind of legal system we have. But the courts and the government are intended to be completely separate.

- Another vital innovation was the establishment of a popular court of appeal against judgments by magistrates; all magistrates were drawn from the upper echelons of Athenian society, so aristocrats dominated legal process.

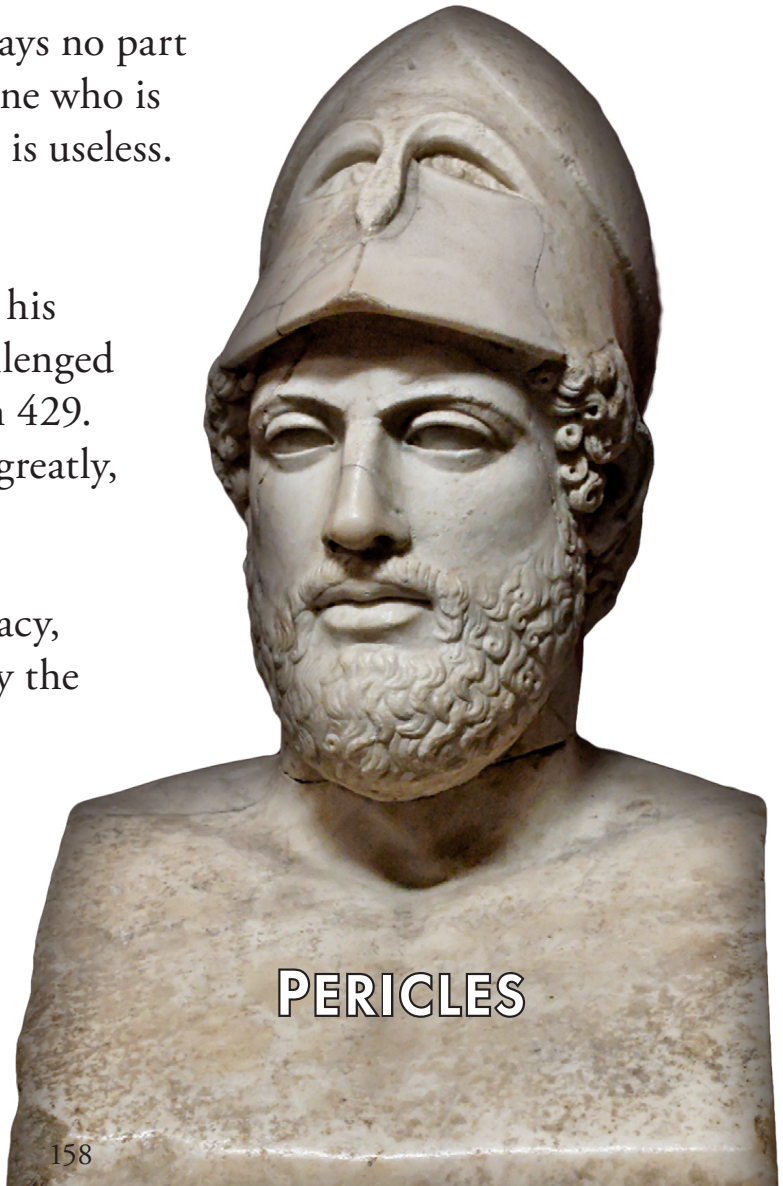
- Athens progressed, largely peacefully, to become a radical democracy—one that empowered every citizen to speak and vote on every matter under debate. Enough to emphasize that radical democracy, unlike representative democracy, requires and at times demands the participation of all its citizens. Public service today doesn't come close to the degree of commitment that was expected of an Athenian citizen or indeed of any citizen of any Greek state, democratic or not.*

- The historian Thucydides put these words into the mouth of the statesman Pericles when he delivered his speech over the dead in the first year of the Peloponnesian War:

> We regard the citizen who plays no part in the affairs of state not as one who is unambitious, but as one who is useless.

- Pericles was the most important politician of his generation, and his dominance was virtually unchallenged from around 448 to his death in 429. Thucydides, who admired him greatly, wrote of him in his obituary:

> What was in name a democracy, under Pericles became rule by the first citizen.




* It's no accident that the word that was used to describe an Athenian who refused to play his part in state business was *idiôtês*, our word *idiot*.

- Like Pericles, Thucydides was an aristocrat, who looked askance at rule by the mob, or *ochlos*.

- After Pericles's death, the historian said that Pericles's successors were more on a level with each other, which just made things worse, because they competed with one another for popular favor, whereas Pericles didn't care at all about what people thought about him. Thucydides said that Pericles led the people, instead of being led by them. Is that a good thing for democracy? Possibly not. The question certainly has relevance today.

- We rightly admire Athenian democracy for its confidence in the common man. But we should never forget that it wouldn't have worked the way it did were it not for the fact that its citizens were free to spend their time debating and deliberating and fighting on behalf of the state by the labors of their slaves. Even so, it's difficult not to admire them for putting the collective before the private and personal.

- We may admire Athenian democracy, but virtually no one in its heyday had anything good to say about it. Two of its severest critics were Thucydides and Plato. However, they were by no means typical of the citizen body. And both of them had an axe to grind. Thucydides had been exiled by the people because of a perceived military blunder, and Plato had a jaundiced view of democracy because of the execution of Socrates.

- Aristotle, who lived in Athens for much of his life, wasn't a friend of democracy either. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that the citizen body should exclude artisans, traders, and farmers. He did this on the fatuous grounds that the enjoyment of leisure is essential for developing virtue and that an independent mind is a luxury that only the wealthy can afford.

- In modern times, too, Athenian democracy has been the frequent target of much criticism. Alexander Hamilton in the Federalist papers wrote:

> It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics† of Greece without feeling sensations of horror and disgust.

† Hamilton meant that of the city-states, the poleis.

- The reputation of Athenian democracy didn't really change until 1846, when George Grote began to publish his 12-volume *History of Greece*, in which he memorably wrote:

> Democracy in Grecian antiquity possessed the privilege, not only of kindling an earnest and unanimous attachment to the constitution in the bosoms of the citizens, but also of creating an energy of public and private action such as never could be obtained under an oligarchy.

- Though Athenian democracy continues to this day to be criticized for its shortcomings—its rampant imperialism, exclusion of women, and unreflective acceptance of slavery—there is an opposite tendency at work that sees it as something to emulate. This is based on the fact that it brought about a degree and level of involvement on the part of the entire citizen body that is unimaginable today.

- Athenian democracy survived rather less than 300 years from the time of Solon, the so-called father of democracy, to the Macedonian takeover in the final decades of the 4th century BCE. Although it did stagger on in a much attenuated and reduced form under the Macedonians and later under the Romans, no longer did the Athenians or any other democracy have the right to implement what we would call a foreign policy. Democracy is therefore not a gift to us moderns from the Greeks.

- For most of their history, the Greeks were denied democracy, and even in the 20th century, their democracy was suspended, first under the fascist dictatorship of General Ioannis Metaxas from 1936 to 1941 and again under the rule of the Colonels, the Junta, from 1967 to 1974.

- And while Athens blazed the trail in introducing radical democracy, not many Greek states followed its example. The majority of poleis were ruled by oppressive oligarchies, whereas others, principally Sparta and Macedon, were ruled by monarchies.

- Sparta was unique in having two kings from two different ruling houses at the same time. Sparta also had a small council of elders consisting of 28 old men and the two kings, as well as an Assembly, but the Assembly didn't discuss anything. It merely gave its assent, very like the Assembly in the *Iliad*, in other words. And if it didn't give its assent, it could simply be ignored.

- There was also a period of Greek history in the 7th and 6th centuries when a number of poleis were ruled by tyrants, Athens among them. The Greeks of the later period vilified the tyrants, but they weren't all bad. Pisistratus, who was tyrant of Athens from the middle of the 6th century onward, took important steps to elevate Athens's economic and cultural standing in the Greek world.

## Athenian Law

- How the law functioned in the early period of Greek history is very difficult to gauge. At the end of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus returns to Ithaca, he doesn't haul the suitors off to court for eating him out of house and home and preying on his wife Penelope, as might be expected. Instead, he summarily executes them, together with his faithless slaves, who betrayed his interests by siding with the suitors.

- This might seem a rather harsh punishment. After all, the suitors didn't actually kill anyone, and Homer never suggests that they made any improper sexual advances to Penelope; they merely pilfered his estate and made overtures of marriage to Penelope. But they did it over a period of years, and they all but destroyed everything he owned.

- If they had succeeded, they would have destroyed his *oikos*, a very charged word in the Greek language for which there is no exact English equivalent. It means family and home and household and property, including land, attached to the home.

- It's obvious that there is no court on the island of Ithaca to which Odysseus can appeal for redress of the injury he has suffered. It's also obvious that no one is going to take legal action against him for exacting revenge in cold blood.

- There's an interesting vignette in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* where a man whose relative has been murdered refuses to accept blood price, or compensation for his murdered relative. Both sides are appealing to an arbiter. It's not trial by jury, but it's moving in that direction. That's because the people who are listening to the two sides are likely to influence the outcome of the trial.

- The first trial by jury, according to the tragic playwright Aeschylus, took place in Athens and was instituted by the goddess Athena, who established the principle that if the votes were equal, the accused should be acquitted. This is the subject of the third play in his trilogy the *Oresteia*, which depicts Orestes's acquittal before the jury that Athena has set up. This, in other words, is the charter myth for the replacement of revenge killing by trial by jury.

**Trial by jury is an essential wing of democracy, and democracy cannot function freely unless it incorporates the principle of being judged by a jury of one's peers. Democracy rests on equality before the law as much as it rests on political participation. The Greeks understood this as well as anyone.**

- In classical times, Athenian juries were very large—some as large as 600 or 601. There was no public prosecutor. Anyone who wished was entitled to bring a charge against anyone. There were no lawyers. Instead, both plaintiff and defendant spoke on their own behalf. Witness statements were read out in court, but witnesses could not be cross-examined.

- The length of time that the plaintiff and the defendant could speak was strictly regulated, about an hour or an hour and a half. After both plaintiff and defendant had spoken, the jury left the courtroom and voted immediately by secret ballot without any deliberation.

- If a majority of the jury judged the accused to be guilty, the jurors would return to the courtroom and both the plaintiff and the defendant would recommend a punishment. The defendant would obviously recommend a more lenient punishment. Even so, it was a gamble. If he‡ recommended too lenient a punishment, the jury would favor the plaintiff's recommendation.

- After both parties had recommended a punishment, the jury would vote again. Most punishments took the form of fines, or in extreme cases, loss of civic rights and exile. Execution was mainly reserved for religious offenses and treason. Imprisonment was a temporary expedient, only resorted to pending trial in the case of violent criminals or posttrial while the condemned, such as Socrates,§ was awaiting execution.

- The Greeks regarded law as a human artifact; there is rarely any suggestion that laws are anything but a product of society. There was, however, a belief that Zeus was the upholder of justice, though the strongest indication of that comes in the plays of Aeschylus, and it's by no means certain that it was universally held.

- The earliest Greek law codes that have survived date to the 7th century. They were an important consequence of the invention of the alphabet.

- We don't know very much about legal practice and legislation outside of Athens. We also don't know how widespread trial by jury was.

- One of the reasons we know so much about Athenian legal practice and law is because we have more than 100 forensic—i.e., law court—speeches dating from about 420 to 320 BCE. Unfortunately, we generally know only one side of the argument. Only very rarely do we have a record of the opposing argument, and only very rarely do we know the verdict.

‡ *He* is used here because women weren't permitted to appear in court. They had to have a man to represent their interests.

§ Socrates could have fled, rather than face execution, if he had chosen. If he had, it would have saved the Athenians a lot of trouble.

- Even so, these speeches teach us a great deal about the type of arguments that plaintiffs and defendants believed would count in their favor. One was what is often characterized as the appeal to pity: It was commonplace for the accused to parade his family before the court, prepped no doubt to be wailing copiously to elicit the sympathy of the court.

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LECTURE 18

# Greek Historians: The Birth of History

The Greeks took the full measure of their successes and failures through their historical writings—especially those of the great historians Herodotus and Thucydides. Though Thucydides's historical approach could hardly be more different from that of Herodotus's, both share this characteristic: They seek to achieve impartiality.

# HERODOTUS'S *HISTORY* (OF THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS)

- According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Candaules was a king of Lydia* who thought his wife was the most beautiful woman in the world. He ill-advisedly told his favorite bodyguard, Gyges, how beautiful she was, and when he suspected that Gyges didn't actually believe him, he ordered him to spy on his wife when she was naked. Gyges protested vehemently to the king but was forced to obey.

- So one night, Gyges observed her undressing. But just as he was about to slip away, she caught sight of him. She felt ashamed—that's what Herodotus tells us—so she decided to get even with her husband for exposing her in this way. She said to Gyges that he could either kill her husband, marry her, and take over the kingdom or else be killed. Gyges chose life over death and stabbed Candaules to death while he was sleeping, all with his wife's connivance.

- The Lydians were horrified by the crime and consulted the oracle at Delphi, who acknowledged Gyges's right to the kingship, but the god at Delphi, Apollo, added a prophecy: Gyges's great-great-grandson will have to be punished for his great-great-grandfather's crime. And so, Western historiography—the writing of history—is born, because that's the opening anecdote† in Herodotus's account of the wars between the Greeks and the barbarians, which he regards as the greatest conflict ever fought.

- This anecdote tells us a great deal about Herodotus's rather simplistic but thoroughly engrossing theory of historical causation—and a great deal, too, about Greek culture. To begin with, although women don't have

* This was a semi-barbarian kingdom in modern-day western Turkey.

† This anecdote was featured in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, which won the Booker Prize in 1992 and was made into a film directed by Anthony Minghella in 1996, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture for that year. As a result, Herodotus's *History* sold like hotcakes in airports.

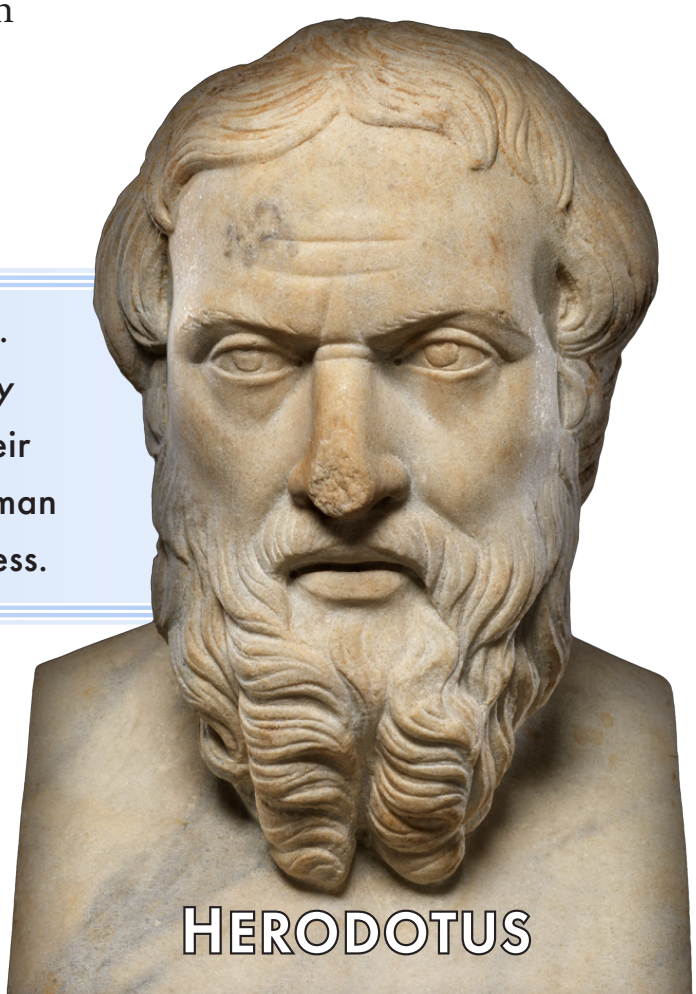
direct power, they certainly have agency. And in fact, they're everywhere in his *History*, making things happen, manipulating and scheming in every way they can.

- Herodotus's awareness of female power is particularly striking in light of the fact that he lived in a society that, for the most part, placed a much lower social value on women than ours does. This is instanced by the fact that he doesn't give, and probably didn't know, the name of Candaules's wife. For all her agency and initiative, she wasn't sufficiently important, socially speaking, to be remembered.

- Another important factor is the emphasis on shame in the anecdote. Shame is an extremely powerful motivator of human behavior in the *Iliad*, and it's obviously still operating thusly two and a half centuries later, here in relation to the behavior of a woman and in what purports to be, what is, a historical account.

- Furthermore, though they don't directly intervene in the anecdote, the gods are nonetheless hovering in the background. Apollo, the god of Delphi, has taken note of the fact that Gyges has done wrong, and though he won't punish him directly, he will punish one of his descendants, which in some ways is a more severe and terrible punishment.

**Herodotus believed unquestioningly in the gods. A conviction of his that permeates his *History* is that they invariably punish mortals for their hubris, or excessive pride, which means that human beings should never strive for too much success.**



- Herodotus's *History* begins with an account of the origin of hostilities between the Greeks and the barbarians that lead to the Trojan War—which he, like every other Greek, took as a historical fact—and ends with the defeat of King Xerxes's expedition to conquer Greece in 479.

- His is the first work to deal with the recent past, rather than with what we would call legends. It's also the first surviving long work in prose. His declared purpose is to ensure "that the great deeds of the Greeks and Persians shall be remembered." Notice that he doesn't differentiate between the Greeks and the Persians here; both of them perform great deeds.

- Herodotus lived from the 480s to the 420s, which means that the wars he describes took place about a generation before he began writing. He grew up in Halicarnassus, a Greek city on the southwestern coast of modern-day Turkey, which was within the orbit of the Persian empire. When he left Halicarnassus in the early 440s, probably to go into exile, he visited Egypt, Phoenicia, the eastern part of the Persian empire, possibly North Africa, and northern Greece, finally settling in Athens.

- The Persian empire in which Herodotus grew up extended over the entire Middle East and beyond, from Pakistan in the east to Egypt in the south and from Macedonia in the west to the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains in the north. It was the world's first truly multiethnic, polyglot empire.

- Even though Herodotus has high respect for Persian culture, education, and accomplishments, he does not whitewash the Persians. He by no means minimizes the cruelty and brutality of Persian kings (and queens).

- Herodotus is often called "the father of history," a title that was first bestowed on him by the Roman orator, philosopher, and politician Cicero. But he's also been given the title "the father of lies." Admittedly, not everything he says is true. His assumed knowledge of what goes on in the boudoirs of the great is highly questionable. But he deserves praise for doing what any historian writing about contemporary events should do: He interviews witnesses on both sides of the divide and does his best to adjudicate between their differing accounts.

- Sometimes it's obvious that his sources have fed him a pack of lies, and it's certainly true, too, that he was a bit gullible at times. But Herodotus probably didn't ever knowingly tell a lie. He saw history‡ in the service of educating—in teaching people how best to live their lives—as well as in the service of preserving the memory of the past.

- Herodotus certainly deserves the title "father of ethnography" for his belief in cultural relativism. "Custom, tradition, is lord of all," he says. It's a principle that he unflinchingly endorses throughout his *History*, while describing, often in loving detail, the peculiar customs of the peoples whom the Persians conquered. The Greco-Persian Wars offered a perfect opportunity to demonstrate how the plucky Greeks came together in their hour of need and heroically defeated an army many times their size.

- But Herodotus did not seize upon the opportunity. On the contrary, he categorically refused to write a patriotic account of the wars from the perspective of the victors. More than that, he never lost an opportunity to demonstrate how the Greeks squabbled among themselves for their own selfish interests and only just managed to rise to the challenge of uniting to face an existential threat to their very survival.

- As Paul Cartledge observed, the Greeks had a "capacity for almost limitless self-criticism as well as unstinting criticism of others." And this is the mentality you need to write any historical account.

- Herodotus thus established the first principle of historiography, which is that it should aim at being impartial. A mere 50 years after the Persians had been seen off, the essential disunity of the Greek world would erupt in a life-or-death quarrel between Athens and Sparta—the so-called Peloponnesian War,§ which is the subject of the history of Herodotus's great successor Thucydides.

‡ The word *history* comes from the Greek *historiê*, which means "inquiry" or "the activity of asking questions."

§ It's called the Peloponnesian War because Sparta's allies, the Peloponnesians, inhabited southern Greece, the Peloponnese.

# Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*

- Thucydides was an Athenian who, because of a perceived military blunder, was sent into exile in 424 for 20 years. This gave him contact with Peloponnesians and, as he says, "leisure to observe affairs more closely." His *History* breaks off in 411, perhaps because the rest is lost or he gave up or he died.

- Thucydides was a moderate oligarch by inclination. He wasn't an enemy of democracy, though he does say some pretty scathing things about it at times, so he can be described as a serious critic. His work is often seen as establishing the discipline of scientific history. That's because the gods play no part in it and because he constantly seeks to identify historical currents that play out in human affairs.

- His cardinal belief was that history should be written for those who seek an understanding of the future, since, as he puts it, "human nature being what it is, the future will resemble, if it does not repeat, the past." He therefore intends his work to be "a possession for always."

- His approach to history is very different from that of Herodotus. Though he never mentions his predecessor by name, it's clear that he's referring to him when he speaks of the absence in his own work of what he calls "a story-telling element," which he admits may turn some of his readers off.

- Thucydides is the originator of the political theory known as Realpolitik, originally a German word meaning politics based on strictly practical consideration rather than on ideology or ideals. It's often encapsulated into the

THUCYDIDES

statement "might is right." We encounter that principle repeatedly in his *History*. For instance, in the last speech he delivers, Pericles memorably warns his fellow countrymen:

> The empire you hold is a tyranny. It may have been wrong to acquire it, but it would be stupid to let it go.

- Frequently, Thucydides presents divergent perspectives on political issues in the form of opposing speeches in the Assembly. A prime example is the Mytilenean Debate, which took place in 427, relatively early in the Peloponnesian War.¶ Thucydides presents the divergent perspectives in the form of a pair of speeches by two politicians, Diodotus and Cleon, who debate the nature of expediency, not what is morally right.

The Peloponnesian War broke out in 431, at the end of what is often called the Periclean era, since Pericles had been dominating the political landscape of Athens for more than 15 years.

- Thucydides is also excellent in providing a deep analysis of civil discord in Corcyra in 427. In so doing, he explores the corruption of language, how moderates lose out to extremists, how those previously subjugated seek their revenge when they get the chance, and how both sides are equally to blame. That's certainly a lesson for all time.

- Crucially, Thucydides believes in applying *pronoia*, or foresight, if you're a politician. It's a quality he assigns to the Athenian politician Themistocles, who realized that Athens had to convert itself into a maritime power when a rich vein of silver was discovered in south Attica.

- Another of Thucydides's central themes is how Athenian democracy functions under the strains of war. Early on, when the Athenians are burying those who have fallen in the first year of fighting, he presents a highly idealized view of Athenian democracy, which he puts into the mouth of Pericles in his so-called funeral speech.

¶ The war lasted from 431 to 404, with an interval in the middle.

- Among the extravagant claims that Pericles makes are the following:

> Poverty in Athens is no bar to success.
> We throw open our city to the world.
> We regard the citizen who takes no part in affairs of state as useless.
> We are the school of Hellas.

- These are wonderful, inspirational words—but they were hardly true. In the very next chapter, Thucydides describes how a terrible plague breaks out a few months later and wipes out between a quarter and a third of the Athenian population, thereby undermining all the claims Pericles made in his funeral speech, since one of the chief consequences of the plague is lawlessness.

- The world Thucydides describes at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War is a dualistic one. Athens and Sparta are diametrically opposed. Athens has maritime supremacy; Sparta enjoys supremacy by land. Athens is hospitable to foreigners and new ideas, whereas Sparta is xenophobic and traditional. The Spartans do one thing and one thing only—they train for war—whereas the Athenians lead a varied and much more rounded existence.

- This is an oversimplification, but it is also largely correct, not least from the pitiful archaeological remains that have come to light in Sparta, compared with the outstanding accomplishments, architectural and otherwise, of the Athenians.

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LECTURE 19

# Greek Philosophy: Man and Nature

As Bernard Williams, a 20th-century English philosopher, said, "The contribution of the Greeks to Western philosophy was philosophy itself." The Greeks—the Athenians in particular—were privileged to have leisure time to devote to thinking, thanks in large part to slavery, but they also had the inclination to do so. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life isn't worth living." We also have the leisure and the inclination to examine the meaning of life, and the fact that we do so by attempting to be rigorous and objective owes much to Greek philosophy.

# SOCRATES

- The first period of Greek philosophy is known as pre-Socratic because of the immense influence of Socrates. Pre-Socratic philosophy was interested solely in the material world and not in human beings, which was what Socrates was interested in.

- Socrates was not, however, the first philosopher to concern himself with human behavior. There was a group of philosophers with whom he was contemporary who also concerned themselves with human beings. These were known as Sophists.

- *Sophist* has come to be a pejorative term, as in *sophistic*, meaning a clever answer that bends the truth. And it is largely due to Socrates and his pupil Plato that the word took on that meaning. The Sophists were relativists, whereas Socrates was an idealist.

- Socrates never wrote anything down, so practically everything we know about him derives from his pupil Plato, who was a voluminous writer and who founded a philosophical school called the Academy.* It has been aptly said that if it weren't for Plato, Socrates would be just a footnote to philosophy. Plato wrote 25 dialogues and a work called the *Apology*, and Socrates is the principal speaker in most of them. Plato also wrote 13 letters, though their genuineness is disputed.

- Because Socrates never wrote anything down, it's impossible to know what was his philosophy and what was the fruit of Plato's reflections. Plato lived a very long life and his ideas changed over time, and no doubt his earlier dialogues represent Socrates best.

- Thus, there are several things we can say with some certainty about the historical Socrates. First, he taught using the dialectic method: the method of question and answer. His goal was to shatter the conceit of

* The Academy was so called because it was located in a grove that was sacred to a revered hero named Academos. That's how the word *academy* entered into our language.

false knowledge. But through this irritating technique, which made his interlocutors look like fools, he fell afoul of the Athenian city body.

- Second, he despised democracy. The fact that Socrates associated with aristocrats makes this clear, but in addition, Plato puts some very dismissive remarks into his mouth that may well be authentic. In the *Republic*, he says:

> Democracy in my view comes about when the poor are successful and kill the rich, exile others, and give everyone else an equal share in political activity and offices, and where the public offices are filled by lot.

Plato's *Republic* is the most widely read philosophical work today.

- Third, he refused to participate in religious observance and claimed that he had access to a private deity. But having a personal deity was unacceptable in Athens. It's one of the reasons why the Athenians executed him.

- Finally, Socrates held the conviction that virtue is based on knowledge. Socrates's rejection of the relativism of the Sophists led Plato down the path of idealistic philosophy: the belief that justice and virtue and courage, etc., aren't relative values but absolute ones.

## PLATO

- In Plato's *Symposium*, his great dialogue of his middle years, Socrates delivers a masterly explanation† of what is often called the theory of forms, or the philosophy of idealism: the theory that we live in a world of shadows that is a pale imitation of truth. He says that there are two kinds of immortality: one due to reproduction in the body and the other due to reproduction in the mind—in other words, through ideas that are transmitted from teacher to pupil.

† The speech that Socrates delivers is attributed to an otherwise unknown person named Diotima, a woman from Mantinea.

- The trajectory of Greek philosophy demonstrates a strong line of intellectual descent from teacher to pupil, most evident in the relationship between Socrates, who taught Plato, and Plato, who taught Aristotle. We learn a lot about teaching from Plato's *Symposium*, which provides a highly instructive starting point for a discussion about what makes a successful teacher.

- Plato, and likely Socrates, wasn't exclusively or even primarily committed to finding true knowledge, or *episteme* (from which we get the word *epistemology*), but instead to uprooting false opinion, or *doxa* in Greek. Both saw nothing wrong with a dialogue ending in *aporia*, which means being in a state of perplexity or puzzlement. To them, being confused and uncertain is better than being certain and wrong.

- Plato is an ambiguous figure. He's a prose writer of great refinement, and in dialogues like the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, he provides us with unique insight into the world of late-5th/early-4th-century Athens and its cast of characters, thanks to the descriptive power of his writing.

- But he is also a somewhat frightening personality. That's because in what is often called his middle period, and more so in his later period, he became repressive and censorious. The ideal state that he envisages in the *Republic* is a totalitarian institution, one in which the individual exists for the good of society as a whole.

- No one put this more forcefully than Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, in which he acknowledges Plato's greatness as a sociologist but exposes what he sees as his attack on liberal democracy and the open society. Plato's hatred of democracy, Popper says, led him to "defend lying … the suppression of truth, and ultimately, brutal violence."

# ARISTOTLE

- Plato's greatest pupil was Aristotle, who studied at the Academy for 20 years. Pupil he may have been, but his own man he became, departing radically from the teachings of his mentor. "Plato is a friend, but truth is a truer friend," Aristotle is said to have remarked.

- Aristotle was born in Macedon, spent a stint in Athens, and returned to Macedon, where he became tutor of Alexander the Great. Then, in 335, he returned to Athens, where he founded his own philosophical school: the Lyceum. Most of what we have of Aristotle's writings appear to be edited lectures. And we have only some of the works he wrote down; many are lost.

- Aristotle has influenced pretty well every branch of intellectual inquiry. Not only did he lay the foundations for two sciences—biology and logic—but he also invented a theoretical vocabulary for conducting scientific research. Words like *species* and *genus*, *subject* and *predicate*, *necessity* and *contingency*, and *potentiality* and *actuality* all owe their genesis to Aristotle.

- Aristotle got certain things wrong. He believed that slavery was "natural" and that women's bodies were inferior to men's, but that shouldn't be held against him. He was a product of his time and couldn't always think outside the box. But he expanded the dimensions of the box exponentially.

- Aristotle's influence wasn't confined to the West. His impact on Islamic high culture was enormous as well, and it remains so to this day in educated circles in Iran.

- Aristotle identified happiness as the supreme good of human life. In fact, he spent more time discussing happiness than any philosopher before modern times. He was also very concerned about teleology: the purpose of an activity.

- In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that human beings seek things like honor and pleasure because they hope they will lead to happiness, but they don't pursue happiness for any other reason or goal than for happiness itself. The pursuit of happiness is a "pursuit" because it requires activity. And, similar to goodness and virtue, upon which the attainment of happiness depends, it is, or at least can be, profound and enduring.

## STOICISM

- There were two major schools of philosophy that evolved around 300 BCE: Epicureanism and Stoicism, both of which were enthusiastically taken up by the Roman elite. Though the founders of each were born abroad, both established their schools in Athens.

- Stoicism, which was founded by Zeno of Citium,‡ takes its name from the fact that its pupils congregated in a colonnaded building known as a stoa§ in the northwest corner of the Athenian agora. Zeno's followers were first known as Zenonians, and then later, perhaps somewhat disparagingly, as Stoics.

- We know very little about Stoicism in the first 300 years of its existence because no philosophical work is extant from that period. A central belief was that virtue, *aretê*, is the highest aim of life.

- Though Stoicism originally had a cosmological aspect to it, by Roman times it was concerned chiefly with ethics. In fact, it's from Roman writers that we learn most by far about Stoicism, specifically from three men: Seneca, advisor to the emperor Nero; Epictetus, a former slave; and the emperor Marcus Aurelius, often regarded as one of the "good" emperors,

‡ Citium was a city in Cyprus.

§ The stoa in question was the Stoa Poikilê, or "Painted Stoa," so identified because of the paintings it housed.

though he did preside over the persecution of the Christians. Seneca and Epictetus lived in the 1st century and Marcus Aurelius in the late 2nd century CE.

- Epictetus¶ was instrumental in promoting the belief that the enslaved are as human as the free. Virtue, according to Seneca and Epictetus, is to be found in the will, which means that every person has perfect freedom, so long as he or she emancipates him- or herself from earthly desires. We can readily understand why such a philosophy would appeal to an ex-slave. Although the body might be imprisoned, Epictetus noted, the mind is always free.

- Marcus Aurelius wrote a book called *Meditations*, in which he gives basic advice about how to live well. He was also a pioneer of globalism, writing the following:

> I am for my city and my country, in so far as I am Antoninus, but in so far as I am a man, I am for the world.

- Stoicism, more than any other ancient philosophical school or intellectual movement or religion, advocated a principle of natural equality—between man and woman, and between master and slave. That said, it did not launch a social revolution to improve the lot of women or to abolish slavery. All the Stoics actually did was to issue a general exhortation to behave equitably to all.

- One criticism is their seeming coldness, even frigidity. They seemed to have believed that although it's all very well to condemn the passions and to seek to rise above them, when someone you love is in pain, you should still try to rise above your emotions and achieve the state of being known by the Greek word *apatheia*, our word *apathy*, though it didn't carry a pejorative sense for the Stoics as it does for us.

¶ Epictetus is the only slave or former slave who has left us anything in writing from either Greece or Rome.

- That said, the Stoics did help to create a world in which Christianity could take root, by advocating the virtue of *philanthropia*, though one very important distinction between Stoicism and Christianity is that the Stoics did not believe in the immortality of the soul.

## EPICUREANISM

- The other major philosophical tradition, Epicureanism, is named after its founder Epicurus, who established a school known as the Garden in Athens. Epicurus's writings are no longer extant, and most of what we know about his philosophy derives from a poem in hexameter verse** written by a Roman poet named Lucretius.

- *Epicurean* in English means someone who overindulges in sensual pleasure, especially pleasure associated with taste. But that's not what Epicurus advocated at all; instead, he advocated a life of strictly moderate pleasure and avoidance of pain.

- Lucretius's great poem *On the Nature of Things*, begins with a very moving invocation to Venus, goddess of love, whom he describes as the guiding power of the universe. But the gods, he indicates, are not concerned with us.

- Lucretius then pays tribute to Epicurus for having rescued humanity from groveling dependence on what we would call superstition. He cites the horrifying example of Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter Iphigeneia to appease Artemis/Diana in order to gain a favorable wind to convey his fleet to Troy.

- Epicurus is Lucretius's hero. In Lucretius's view, Epicurus is a monster slayer, except that the monster he's slain is not some many-headed beast of mythology, but the world of our sick imaginings—in particular, our fear of death and the world to come.

** This was the meter used by Homer and Vergil.

- Everything is material according to Epicurean belief. That's because everything is made out of atoms, the building blocks of the universe, which can't be divided. Even the soul, Epicurus alleges, is made of atoms, albeit very fine atoms. There's no point worrying about death, because death is merely oblivion. So enjoy yourself, within limits, because to go to excess is to invite pain.

It's generally claimed that philosophy remained a lively industry in Athens until 529, when the Byzantine emperor Justinian withdrew funding. But as so often in history, things aren't quite that simple. Plato's Academy was largely inactive in the 1st centuries BCE and CE, and even after 529, the tradition of philosophical discourse didn't die out completely.

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LECTURE 20

# Greek Science: Discovery and Controversy

The Greeks invented anatomy, astronomy, biology, botany, geometry, gynecology, mathematics as we know it, optics, pharmacology, physics, physiology, and zoology—and it's fitting that all of these terms derive from the Greek. The Greeks weren't so much interested in what we call the social sciences, unless we include history among the social sciences. But they were interested in anthropology, ethnography, and political science.

# ASTRONOMY

- The mid-5th-century pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras was charged with impiety—in Athens, of all places—for claiming that the sun is a shining stone about the size of the Peloponnese. He got that wrong, but the point is that he denied that the sun was a god, which was the "official" line at the time. So he was taking an important step in advocating a rational explanation for the universe and everything that is in it. Incidentally, Anaxagoras did work out correctly why eclipses occur, which had baffled the finest minds up to that point.

- Astronomy was the branch of scientific inquiry where the Greek achievement was unparalleled. Here's a list of some of the greatest discoveries:

  - In the 7th/6th century, Thales of Miletus predicted solar eclipses.

  - In the 4th century, Aristotle demonstrated that the earth is spherical in shape.

  - Later in the 4th century, Heracleides of Pontus* proposed that the earth rotates on its axis once every day.

  - In the 3rd century, Aristarchus of Samos claimed that the sun, rather than the earth, is at the center of the universe.

  - Also in the 3rd century, Eratosthenes of Cyrene† calculated with a high degree of accuracy the circumference of the earth.

  - In the 2nd century, Hipparchus of Bithynia discovered the precession of the equinoxes.

  - In the 1st century BCE, Sosigenes of Alexandria in Egypt calculated that a solar year is 365 and a quarter days long.

* Pontus is a region on the southern shore of the Black Sea.

† Cyrene is in Libya.

- That's not a bad record, considering it was all done with mathematics and the naked eye.

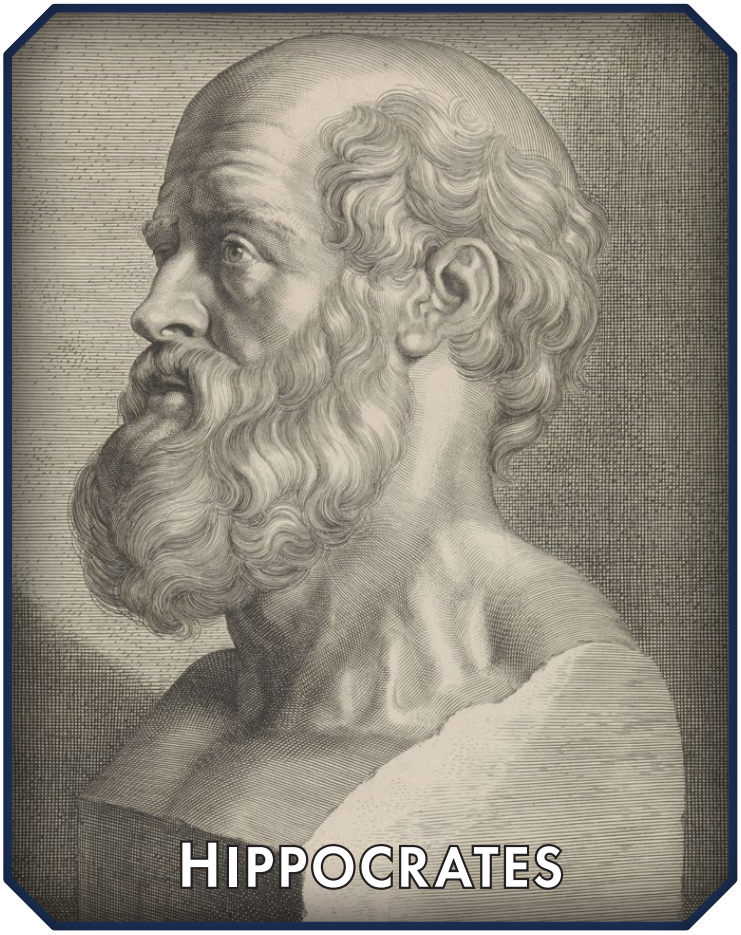
- Note that these scientists didn't all reside in one place; on the contrary, they were part of an emerging global movement of scientific inquiry.

Science never goes unchallenged, even in the most supposedly advanced societies, such as our own.

## MEDICINE

- It was the Greeks who invented what we call rational medicine—medicine that depended on rational inquiry and that offered a rational, not divine, explanation for every illness.

- According to legend, the founder of Greek medicine was a shadowy figure named Hippocrates, who lived, assuming he was a real person, in the first half of the 5th century BCE, probably on Kos, an island off the modern-day Turkish coast. Hippocrates is credited with authoring the eponymous Hippocratic oath, which physicians swear by, in a somewhat altered form, to this day. Some 70 medical treatises are ascribed to him.




- It was Hippocrates, or one of his followers, who established the highly influential doctrine of the four bodily fluids, or humors: black bile, which enters English from the Greek as *melancholy*; yellow bile or choler, which gives us our word *choleric*,

meaning "bad-tempered or irascible"; phlegm, our word *phlegmatic*, which means "imperturbable," even to a fault; and blood, from the Latin word *sanguis*, hence *sanguine*, meaning "cheerful" or "optimistic."

- It was the job of the Hippocratic physician to establish harmony between the four humors, since sickness was due to an imbalance between them. They sought to restore harmony by procedures such as bloodletting, purgation, and change of diet. Such was the power of this doctrine that these medical procedures were still current in the 19th century.‡

- Medical science, like astronomy, had its enemies. One major problem was that it was practiced against the background of an unquestioned belief in the biological and intellectual inferiority of women. And in fact, medical science was co-opted to lend legitimacy to that prejudice.

- We see evidence of this in a short Hippocratic§ treatise called *Illnesses Affecting Virgins*, in which the author observes that virgins, when they reach menarche, the beginning of menstruation, become delirious and subject to visions, whereupon they are tempted to end their lives either by drowning themselves or by hanging themselves.

- The reason for this is because the menstrual blood cannot flow properly until what he calls "the orifice of egress" has been opened up, and the only way to do this is by having sexual intercourse, since this enables the blood to expel itself fully. If the blood remains in the body, it will produce torpor and insanity in the sufferer. And the author goes on to say the following:

> My prescription is that virgins should marry as soon as possible. If they become pregnant, they'll be cured. If they don't, they'll die, unless some other ailment carries them off.

‡ Lord Byron was subjected to bloodletting when he contracted a fever in Missolonghi on his way to support the Greeks in their War of Independence, and he died in consequence.

§ The word *Hippocratic* here merely means that the treatise was written by a physician attached to the Hippocratic school of medicine.

- What masqueraded as pseudoscience thus provided the rationale for why a father should marry off his daughter as soon as she reached puberty. This crackpot theory also had the "favorable" consequence of casting the male as savior, since it was by penetration that he cured his suffering partner of her manic state of mind.

- Prejudice of this sort riddled Greek science—not just medicine, but also biology—and blinkered some of the greatest scientists of their day. In *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle wrote: "A woman is an infertile male, being unable to concoct semen owing to the coldness of her nature." The menses, in other words, is failed semen.

- But it wasn't just prejudice that prevented obstetrics and gynecology from progressing. Another factor was that medical dissection was prohibited for religious reasons. This meant that knowledge of human anatomy in general, not just of female anatomy, was strictly limited.

- The ban on dissection was briefly lifted around 300 BCE in Alexandria, which at that time was the leading center of medical inquiry. For the first time in history, a physician, named Herophilus of Chalcedon, was free to examine the sexual organs of men and women. He did so by dissecting cadavers in public.

- A Hippocratic treatise entitled *On the Sacred Disease* tells us much of the resistance to rational inquiry that physicians faced. The sacred disease in question was epilepsy. The symptoms of epilepsy are so curious and the attack comes on so suddenly and unexpectedly that the Greeks believed it was due to the gods.

- Not so, the author of the treatise passionately argues. The disease, he asserts, is no more divine than any other. It has an entirely natural cause. It's due to an imbalance in the four humors, the theory that was so dear to Hippocratic physicians. Epilepsy, the author claimed, was caused by phlegm leaving the brain, where it should remain, and flowing into the veins. That's absurd, but the important point is that the author was making a major contribution to rational inquiry by debunking the theory that the disease had a divine origin.

- The author of a Hippocratic treatise called *Seed* roundly condemned what he called "witch doctors, faith-healers, quacks, and charlatans" for fallaciously claiming to know medical lore. The Greek world, no doubt, had its share of snake-oil salesmen. Fighting for reason is never easy.

- Hippocratic physicians should also be commended for the fact that they took pains to chart the progress of a disease, even if the cure baffled them, and for recording examples of faulty interventions that proved fatal to the patient. At the same time, we should not ignore the fact that there were always severe risks attendant upon medical intervention in the ancient world, as there have been in modern times as well.

- Although Hippocratic doctors rejected the belief in the divine origin of disease, they did not reject religion per se—and nor, for that matter, did religion reject them. It's something of a paradox that around the time that Hippocratic medicine was establishing itself, the cult of the healing god Asclepius was taking root.

- Asclepius was a latecomer to the Greek pantheon. It was believed that he was originally a mortal healer who was slain by Zeus's thunderbolt for having attempted to raise someone from the dead. Previously, medicine had been in the care of Apollo, but around the beginning of the 5th century, there grew a need for a god who was exclusively devoted to cure.

ASCLEPIUS

- By 300 BCE, some 200 sanctuaries of Asclepius had been established in the Greek world. The most important ones were at Cnidus, on the west coast of modern-day Turkey; on Cos, the island opposite; at Pergamum, also close to the west coast; and, arguably greatest of all, at Epidaurus, in the northeast Peloponnese.

- In all of these sanctuaries,¶ the sick slept in dormitories somewhat like hospitals hoping to be visited by Asclepius in a dream. In the morning, they would report their dreams to the priests, who would recommend appropriate treatment, and if you were lucky, a miraculous cure ensued. There is a series of inscriptions at Epidaurus** engraved on stone by grateful patients describing their miraculous cures, including for blindness, paralysis, lameness, infertility, headaches, and baldness.

- The sanctuaries of Asclepius accommodated surgeons, as we know from the numerous instruments that have been found there that testify to a very high degree of medical expertise. What we would call Western-style medicine and faith healing coexisted side by side.

- In the Christian era, eminent Greek physicians emigrated to Rome, anticipating a brain drain from the Greek homeland that would repeat itself in contemporary times. The most influential of these was the 2nd-century-CE physician Galen, who began his medical career in Pergamum.

- Galen claimed that he entered the medical profession because he was visited by Asclepius when his father was sick and that the god urged him to become a doctor. He had previously tended to gladiators, with all their cuts, bruises, fractures, and broken bones, so he had had plenty of opportunity to study human anatomy. He also dissected animals, though he was at heart more of a theorist than an empirical observer.

¶ Epidaurus and the other healing sanctuaries functioned very much like their modern-day equivalents, Lourdes in France being a prime example.

** Today, Epidaurus, apart from its magnificent theater, is a ruin. The suspicion is that it was deliberately vandalized by the early Christians because they were unnerved by the uncanny resemblance between Asclepius and Christ.

- His theories became enormously influential, not least in the Islamic world. The first translations of his works into Arabic appeared in the 9th century, and it was through Latin translations of the Arabic translations that Galen first reached the West two centuries later.

> Greek science faced an uphill battle, and we can't properly understand the society in which it was practiced without understanding the tremendous obstacles that were faced at times by those undertaking free inquiry.

## TECHNOLOGY

- There was little need for technology in the Greek world and therefore no incentive to invent it. Slaves and animals, chiefly donkeys and oxen, did all the heavy lifting.

- The three greatest inventions—the ones that probably made the most difference to people's lives—are the crane, the sundial, and Archimedes's screw (which was used for irrigation). It's not a very impressive list.

- In 1901, Greek sponge divers discovered an interesting apparatus in the waters off the tiny island of Antikythera in the Aegean Sea. Made of bronze, it worked by means of at least 30 interlocking gears, which tracked the movement of the sun, the moon, and the planets and predicted eclipses. It was what we call an orrery, albeit a geocentric one (one that took the earth to be the center of the universe).

- The so-called Antikythera mechanism also recorded the occurrence of Panhellenic festivals like the Olympic Games. It would have been of immense value to a wide variety of professions, including farming and religion. It's unlikely that it was one of a kind; there may have been many such mechanisms in the Greek world. But we're extremely lucky that one

at least has survived. It's so complex that for a long time, it was thought to be a fake. Nothing of the same complexity occurred until the 14th century with the development of mechanical clocks.

- One of the most accurate timepieces was used in the courts to make sure that the plaintiff and the defendant spoke for exactly the same amount of time. Known as a *klepsudra*, which means "water thief," it is comprised merely of two vases of identical capacity. One vase has a small hole at the rim and a largish hole at the bottom, plugged with a small cork to prevent water from flowing out. The other is just an ordinary vase without holes.

- You place the two vases in the courtroom where everyone can see them, fill the vase with the holes to the level of the small hole, and place it above the vase without the holes. When the plaintiff or the defendant begins to speak, the judge orders a slave to remove the cork from the upper vase to allow water to flow into the lower vase. When the water has completely flowed from the upper vase into the lower vase, the judge orders the speaker to stop speaking. In this way, both the defendant and the plaintiff have exactly the same amount of time to get their arguments across—down to the last second.

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LECTURE 21

# The Greek Way of Waging War

Waging war is a cultural exercise. Wars have their rituals, strategies, techniques, rules of conduct, weapons, etc., and these factors influence the way that each war is waged.

# Homeric Warfare

- Our first picture of Greeks at war is provided by the *Iliad*, in which Homer tells us that arms and armor are made of bronze. One of the reasons why the fights were over so quickly was that the soldiers were weighed down by all that bronze. They wear greaves, which cover the lower part of their legs; a breastplate; and a helmet with a crest of horsehair. Their breastplates are plated, which means they bend with the body. Their shields are made of oxhide stretched over a wooden frame.

- Warriors fight with a pair of throwing spears or a single thrusting spear. At close quarters, they use their swords, frequently described as "silver-studded." Bow and arrows are of secondary importance.

- We don't know much about the rabble, who presumably make up the bulk of the army. They probably don't have any armor and just fight with anything they can get their hands on. Homer doesn't bother to tell us. There's no cavalry.

- Another "weapon" is the gods, who intervene on the battlefield, most commonly by breathing *menos*, or strength, into a fighter, rather in the manner of a rush of adrenaline.

- Mostly what dominates the fighting and directs the outcome of the battles is one-to-one combat. Sometimes a formal dual is arranged. The climax of the *Iliad* is a contest between the two principal antagonists, Achilles and Hector. It's not unlike a gunfight in a Western, except that the fight is made more uneven by the fact that Athena clouds Hector's wits.

- Homer assumes that one man can make all the difference to the outcome of a battle. The plot of the *Iliad* rests on the pretension that the withdrawal of Achilles from the fighting will enable the Trojans to drive the Greeks back to their encampment and set fire to their ships. While Achilles heads a force of 2,500* Myrmidons, they never play any major part in the action.

- Likewise, we know that once Hector dies, the fall of Troy will inevitably follow, since Hector is its most valiant defender. Implausible though this may seem, there are instances in history where the withdrawal or death of a commander in battle so demoralized an army that it gave up the fight.

- Homeric warfare is highly ritualistic. Warriors are conveyed to the battlefield in chariots driven by a trusted companion. Then, warriors dismount and do battle on foot. The chariot usually remains stationary while the warrior fights, ready to convey him elsewhere if he's wounded or goes in search of another worthy opponent of similar rank.

- As the ancient history professor Hans van Wees notes, one in six battlefield confrontations involve opponents who agree to fight with one another. And once a hero has found a warrior of suitable rank, he issues a challenge, and then he and his opponent reveal their pedigrees. Before fighting, warriors hurl insults at one another to gain a kind of psychological edge.

* We're told that he brought 50 ships with 50 men in each.

- Usually, the fight is over very quickly. One of the warriors throws a spear, it misses, and the other moves in for the kill with a counter-throw. Only 18 of the 300 engagements that are described in the *Iliad* involve more than a single blow. And then, death occurs instantaneously.

- If a warrior falls to the ground wounded but is not killed outright, he generally offers the victor a ransom in the hope that his life will be spared. When Hector is at Achilles's mercy, he begs for his life, and Achilles scornfully rejects his appeal—thus violating the norm, as it was customary to accept a ransom.

- If the victor rejects the appeal and kills his opponent, a fight takes place around the corpse, as the enemy attempts to gain possession of it and strip it of its armor. That's because armor was very costly. But it was also a disgrace to the deceased, not least since the honorable burial of the dead was enormously important in those times, just as it is in our society. After the kill, the victor may again hurl abuse at his victim.

- When a major hero is killed, his death interrupts the war. When Patroclus is killed, the Greeks hold funeral games in his honor. And when Hector's corpse is returned to Priam, a truce is negotiated so that the Trojans can properly mourn him.

- Homer's description of what Achilles calls "blood and slaughter and the choking groan of men" is unsurpassed in its realistic treatment of the brutality of the battlefield. But how realistic is it? Sir Moses Finley wrote about fighting in the *Iliad*:

> The confusion is indescribable. No one commands or give orders. Men enter the battle and leave at their own pleasure.

- He's right, so if something like the Homeric style of fighting ever did take place, what we read in the *Iliad* is a fantastical version.

- One-to-one combat dominates the poem, but it's not the only kind of fighting that takes place. Occasionally, we see fighting between bands of warriors, about 50 in number. This brings Homeric warfare closer to the Classical style of waging war, with its emphasis on hoplites: heavily armed soldiers who fight in battle formation in phalanxes.

## Panhellenic Rules of War

**The Greeks didn't have internationally recognized laws that regulated the practice of warfare comparable to the Geneva Convention, but they did abide by internationally recognized practices:**

- The sacred truce between all warring Greek states should be recognized both for the duration of the Olympic Games and the period immediately before and after, when contestants and spectators were journeying to Olympia.
- Permission should be granted to the defeated side to return to the battlefield to recover its dead.
- Heralds and suppliants should be protected.
- Holy places, both sanctuaries and cemeteries, must be respected.
- Prisoners of war should be exchanged for ransom.
- Noncombatants should be treated with respect.

**Like Homeric warfare, hoplite warfare observed a strict sense of rules:**

- War should be officially declared.
- A ritual challenge should precede every battle.
- There should be no preemptive attacks.
- War should be predominantly fought between hoplites, not slingers or archers.
- Noncombatants should not be targeted.

# Hoplite Warfare

- Hoplite† warfare was the dominant form of warfare throughout the Greek world from perhaps the first half of the 7th century to the latter half of the 4th century. Every Greek polis, or city-state, required all its male citizens to serve in the military when called upon to do so. Serving either in the army or the navy wasn't just seen as a duty, however. It was also a privilege.

- Interstate wars—wars between Greek states—were ubiquitous in the Archaic and Classical periods. The reason why most of these wars were fought seems to be due to no other cause than it's springtime and testosterone is in the air. A particularly common cause of such wars, as the ancient history professor Simon Hornblower noted, is *phthonos*, meaning "grudge" or "resentment."

- The hoplite was someone who could afford hoplite armor, along with the rest of his equipment: a shield, a helmet, a breastplate, greaves, a sword, and two spears. It's estimated that hoplites constituted between 20 percent and 40 percent of the citizen body of any Greek polis.

- It was hoplite warfare that came to dominate warfare on land, not cavalry or archers or men armed with slings—hence the importance of the middle class, as we might anachronistically call them, because only they could afford to purchase hoplite armor.

† Hoplite warfare is named for the big round bronze shield over a wooden core known as a *hoplon*, which an infantryman carried.

- The army bred a sense of egalitarianism, as well as of camaraderie. Whether you stood in a phalanx or a rectangular formation, as a hoplite, your safety was dependent on the men beside you and required an equal effort by all. Both experiences, in a nutshell, promoted democracy.

- Fighting in a hoplite battle was exhausting. Your shield alone weighed 16 pounds and was three feet in diameter. When the two opposing armies came in contact with each other, it was like two heavy trucks, or perhaps even tanks, crashing into one another head-on.

- Moreover, once the general had given the order to engage, the army was pretty much on its own. You certainly wouldn't be able to hear any orders being given while wearing a bronze helmet and with people screaming everywhere.

- A lot of the battle was about pushing and shoving—the men in the ranks behind pushing the men in the ranks ahead forward. If you fell, you were likely to be crushed underfoot by your own side. It was also about stabbing with your spear, less about slicing and slashing.

- It's estimated that the average battle probably lasted barely an hour, most no more than half an hour. The human body can't last long under these punishing conditions.

- The objective of most hoplite battles was merely to secure a tactical victory. It wasn't to render the enemy incapable of returning for another bout of hostilities the next year.

- Rarely was a defeated army pursued, other than off the field of battle. That's why most battles ended with the erection of a trophy by the victorious side.‡ The trophy generally took the form of a tree trunk decorated with spoils left behind by the enemy, a purely temporary structure, although permanent trophies were sometimes erected later.

‡ Our word *trophy* comes from the Greek word *tropaion*, which is connected with the verb *trepô*, meaning "turn," since the trophy was erected at the spot where the victors caused the enemy to turn and flee.

- The campaigning season began in the spring and generally ended in the fall. In other words, it was a seasonal activity. Things changed greatly during the Greco-Persian Wars and later during the Peloponnesian War, when something akin to our notion of total war evolved. But even during these periods of life-or-death struggles, the scale and intensity of engagement eased off during the winter.

- Battles didn't only take place on land. The Athenians from the 480s onward were primarily a naval power. Their fleet was manned primarily by the free poor who could not afford hoplite arms. This signaled the political rise of those previously excluded from military service, and hence the move toward democracy, since the security of the state depended on its rowers—i.e., the poor. The percentage who served as rowers was probably between 40 percent to 55 percent of the citizen body.

- Athenian ships are called triremes.§ They're among the most beautiful and swiftest ships ever built. They're extremely light and can do a complete U-turn in less than two ships' length. A trireme has three tiers on which the rowers sit. Each rower has a seat assigned to him. The top tier requires the most skill and the most strength because the oars are highest out of the water. When the rowing master gave the order to the rowers to put their backs into it, a trireme could reach a top speed of nine to 10 knots.

- Rowers would ram an enemy ship's broadside, smashing into its hull with the bronze prow, with which every trireme was fitted. Another tactic was to sail close alongside the enemy ship and snap all its oars in two before the enemy had time to raise them out of the water. Their ship quickly tilted over and became a sitting duck. Then, the 30 Athenian hoplites who also served on board clambered aboard the enemy ship and laid into the defenseless rowers on the top tier, while those in the lower two tiers drowned as their ship sank.

§ Triremes were financed by wealthy Athenians called trierarchs. Once a trierarch has been selected, it's up to him to devote as much money as he likes to maintain the condition of his trireme.

Ancient historians have rightly emphasized the close connection between Greek warfare and Greek politics.

## Changes in Warfare

- The Peloponnesian War took a very heavy toll on morality. One of the main reasons for this is because it was so protracted. It lasted, off and on, for a quarter of a century. Things may be relatively civilized to begin with, but the longer hostilities last, the more brutal they become.¶

- An important development in this period was the use of light-armed troops to attack hoplites, as well as surprise attacks often carried out under the cover of darkness.

- As the ancient history professor Josiah Ober points out, in the 4th century BCE, basically all rules of engagement were thrown out of the window. One of the main reasons was that combatants were increasingly becoming mercenaries, who felt no allegiance to the city-state as a political unit and saw no reason to refrain from using extreme measures to achieve their ends. A profound consequence of their rise, therefore, was the severing of ties between military service and citizenship and an erosion of the previously indissoluble relationship between citizen and city-state.

- Major changes in warfare occurred in the time of Philip II of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great. The infantry still fought in phalanxes but carried spears that were almost 20 feet in length. They had little body armor and tiny shields.

¶ The horrors of war are frequently highlighted by the Greek tragedians, the prime example being Euripides's *Trojan Women*, produced in 415. War also occurs prominently in Aristophanes's comedies, such as *Acharnians*, produced in 425, and *Lysistrata*, produced in 411.

- Light-armed troops with missiles, heavy-armed cavalry, and infantry were now integrated into a much more complex style of fighting, making the outcome of a battle dependent on a unity of forces. Battles also lasted much longer than they ever had before—several hours in length, in fact.

- The battles that Alexander fought had a very different objective from those that were customarily fought between fellow Greeks. Instead of leaving his vanquished enemy to retreat, Alexander pursued it with all possible force to annihilate it altogether. Battles for him were primarily about territorial conquest—a more modest aim, but nonetheless largely a new concept in the Greek-speaking world.

## READINGS

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van Wees, *Greek Warfare.*

LECTURE 22

# Greek Language, Literacy, and Writing

From the evidence of the pre-alphabetical script used by the Mycenaeans called Linear B, we know that the inhabitants of the Greek mainland and the island of Crete were speaking Greek by the 13th century BCE at the latest. From the analysis of place names and from archaeological data, however, some scholars maintain that Greek—or at least a language called proto-Greek—was being spoken in the region as early as 2000 BCE. This would mean that Greek is the one of the oldest European languages, with a history going back at least 3,000 years and possibly as many as 4,000.

# LANGUAGE

- Though we don't know its origins, Greek belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, which extends from Iceland to Bangladesh. It's of the same family as Latin, Sanskrit, and German. Greek wasn't just a monolithic language, however. There were several dialects, of which the principal ones were Ionic, Doric, and Aeolic. But there were also important subdivisions. For example, Attic was a subdivision of Ionic, spoken by Athenians.

- Were these dialects mutually intelligible? In other words, could Greeks who spoke Aeolic understand Greeks who spoke Doric? We can't know the answer to that in certain terms, but the likelihood is that they could. We never hear of any Greek speakers having difficulty in understanding any others. They did, however, make fun of one another's dialect, as we know from the comic poet Aristophanes, who makes fun of Megarians* and Spartans.

* Megara shared a border with Athens.

- Until the Hellenistic period—the period following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE—the Greeks continued to speak and communicate in dialects. Following Alexander's conquests, however, a dialect known as *koinê*† or "common," short for *koinê dialektos*, or "common language," became universal among the educated throughout the Hellenistic world. And this raises the question of Macedonian, the dialect or language spoken by Philip II and Alexander the Great: Was it a dialect or a separate language, albeit in the family of Greek languages?

- Much more important to the ancient Greeks than the division of their language into dialects was the division between their language and non-Greek languages, principally Persian. Persians turn up in Aristophanes, and their speech is roundly mocked.

- With the collapse of the Mycenaean world, Linear B died out, and Greece remained illiterate for 400 years. The alphabet was introduced into Greece through contact with the Phoenicians around 800 BCE. Though Homer was familiar with writing, his poems are largely a product of the oral tradition and were transmitted initially by rhapsodes. This was true, too, of other poems about the Trojan War that have not survived, the poems that belong to the so-called Trojan War cycle.

- In the Greek language, word order is much more flexible than its English equivalent. It doesn't have to stick with our subject-object-verb routine because it's an inflected language: The endings of words change, and it is inflection, not word order, that determines the role of each in any sentence.

- A second feature of Greek expression is the fondness for antithesis. The Greeks love sentences that begin "on the one hand" and then continue "on the other hand." Balanced thinking of this kind was a characteristic feature of Greek rhetorical delivery, in the Assembly as well as in the lawcourts.

† Koine is the dialect in which the New Testament is written.

- There are no fewer than four moods, as grammarians call them, in Greek: the indicative, the subjunctive, the optative, and the imperative. English has basically two moods: the indicative and the imperative. The subjunctive and the optative are practically extinct.

- Another characteristic feature of the Greek language is the insistence upon what are called particles, basically conjunctions, to link sentences together. The simplest are the equivalents of our words *however*, *for*, *indeed*, *therefore*, and the like, though there are some more complex ones in Greek. The purpose of these particles is to ease the flow of thought from one sentence to the next by preparing the listener or reader for what follows, whether it be directly consequential or adversative.

- Greek was the first language to acquire the ability to think conceptually by the introduction of abstract nouns like *justice*, *virtue*, and *truth*. Previously, from Homer onward, abstract ideas were expressed by nominalizing adjectives—in other words, making adjectives into nouns. Thus, to convey the idea of justice as a concept, you would have to say "the thing that is just."

- The situation began to change in the final decades of the 5th century BCE. We can see the language evolving in Thucydides and a generation later in Plato.

- To be able to talk of "justice" rather than "the thing that is just" had enormous implications for the development of the human mind—for philosophy in particular. Plato would scarcely have been able to develop his idealistic philosophy, based on the theory of ideal forms, if he hadn't had an abstract language with which to elaborate and explore it. Almost every other European language, Latin included, is indebted to Greek for this development, as is indicated by the languages' dependency on loan words from the Greek that express abstract ideas and concepts.

- Greek is a much older language than Latin. And when the Romans first encountered the Greeks in the 3rd century BCE, Latin as a literary language was still in its infancy. And when the Romans began to conquer the Greek world and engage the services of Greek slaves to teach their

sons, well-educated Romans learned Greek and paraded it as a sign of their cultural sophistication. Some of them even conversed with one another in Greek to show they were cultivated.

- But it wasn't a two-way street. Greeks for the most part didn't learn Latin, which means that most bilingual speakers were Roman, because the Romans, to their immense credit, didn't seek to impose Latin on their imperial subjects. The result is that by the 1st century CE, more people living in the Roman Empire were speaking Greek than Latin.

- The Romans permitted Greek to be used for all official purposes in the eastern half of the empire. In other words, Greek didn't have the status merely of a vernacular language. And it continued to be spoken in the East when the Roman Empire split in two.

- When Greece achieved independence from the Ottomans and established itself as a nation-state in the 19th century, it adopted a new language for official purposes: *Katharevousa*, meaning "the pure language"—pure in the sense that it wasn't polluted by loan words borrowed from the Turkish language.

- Katharevousa was invented by the Greek scholar Adamantíos Koraïs, who based the new language on the grammar of Classical Greek and in the dialect of Attic, or Athenian. As a result, many new words were coined that were based on ancient roots.

- Katharevousa was invented in opposition to *dimotiki*, or popular Greek, which was the language spoken in Greece at the time of the War of Greek Independence in the 1820s. It had been for centuries, but it was now regarded as corrupt, because of its borrowings from Turkish and Italian.

- But though Katharevousa was the official language, demotic Greek didn't die out. In fact, demotic became identified with the progressives, whereas Katharevousa was identified with the conservative right wing—which is rather ironic, given the fact that it was previously associated with Ottoman oppression.

- Demotic became the official language in 1976 after the expulsion of the Junta, the Colonels who suspended Greek democracy in 1967. And by the beginning of the 21st century, Katharevousa had become obsolete.

If you'd like to learn the Greek language, check out the Great Course *Greek 101: Learning an Ancient Language* by Hans-Friedrich Mueller.

## WRITING

- Our first evidence for writing comes in the form of an undeciphered script called Linear A, a Minoan writing system used between 1850 and 1400 BCE, which may or may not have been Greek. The Minoans also used a hieroglyphic system, which also hasn't been deciphered.

- Linear B, which was so named to distinguish it from Linear A, may or may not have been directly related to Linear A. It has been deciphered and was based on the principle that one sign represents one syllable. It is incontestably Greek. The signs were originally pictorial; they represented objects.‡

- Linear B writing is engraved on clay tablets by means of a sharp instrument. Most of these tablets date to the 13th century BCE. They've been found at a number of Mycenaean sites, including Cnossus on Crete. The script shows remarkable uniformity at all sites, indicating a high level of administrative control and suggesting that the writers of Linear B belonged to a professional guild.

- When the Greeks developed the alphabet, the commonest writing material was papyrus, which the Greeks had to import. Stalks of papyrus were laid out in crisscross fashion in horizontal and vertical strips and then were bonded together by pounding with a stone that released their natural juices, which served as glue.

‡ The technical word for such a picture is *ideogram*.

- Books hadn't yet been invented, so you read from a long roll that you unfolded as you went along. When you'd finished reading, you had to reroll the scroll back to the beginning.

- We have tens of thousands of papyri found in the dry sands of Egypt dating to the Hellenistic period. They provide us with the earliest examples of genuine correspondence in the Greek world, as well as tax returns, receipts, census reports, marriage contracts, inventories, horoscopes, records of court proceedings, wills, and literary texts.

> The largest cache of papyri comes from the city of Oxyrhynchus, 100 miles south of Cairo, where a rubbish dump has yielded an estimated half a million papyri, of which only 5,000 have been transcribed to date.

- Many documents, including shopping lists and the like, are written on the reverse of papyri that contain scraps of Greek literature. This is because papyrus was an expensive item to purchase. Other papyri are palimpsests, or papyri on which later writing has been superimposed.

- Papyri were rolled up. Books didn't exist in the Classical period or, indeed, in the Hellenistic period. The paged codex,§ which was the forerunner of the modern book, is first mentioned in the 1st century CE. It had completely replaced the papyrus roll by the 6th century.

- We have a papyrus of a comedy by a dramatist named Menander and another of a work by Aristotle called the *Constitution of Athens*. But we don't have an original copy of the works of Homer or Herodotus or Aeschylus or Sophocles or Euripides or Plato—the list is practically endless—and we are therefore entirely reliant on copyists.

- Texts were copied and recopied in antiquity multiple times, and then, after a lapse of several hundred years, they were copied again by medieval monks. Undoubtedly, they did the best they could, but over time errors are sure to have crept in.

§ *Codex* is a Latin word that means "tree trunk," perhaps an allusion to the tree trunk–like shape of an ancient book.

# LITERACY

- For hundreds of years after the introduction of the Greek alphabet around 800 BCE, only a minority of Greeks could read or write. That's why, around 594 BCE, when the lawgiver Solon wanted to promote his political program to his fellow Athenians, he committed his ideas to poetry, which can be easily memorized and is therefore the medium best suited for the dissemination of information in a largely illiterate society.

- Literacy increased around the middle of the 5th century, once Athens had converted itself into a radical democracy. Democracy depended on the fact that a substantial proportion of the citizen body—all males, of course—achieved a high level of at least functional literacy, meaning the ability to read with some degree of competence the often lengthy and detailed documents that were inscribed on stone recording decrees passed by the Assembly.

- Though many Athenians could read and write at a sophisticated level, they may well have been in the minority.

- Many slaves would have been able to read and write. Indeed, it's extremely likely that many authors dictated their works to slaves. Undoubtedly, some slaves were purchased specifically with the purpose of keeping records or reading to their owners or taking down dictation. It was surely slaves, too, who made multiple copies of literary works that went on sale.

- We should never forget our indebtedness to them. If it hadn't been for slaves transcribing the poems of Sappho, the plays of Sophocles, the dialogues of Plato, probably little of Greek literature would have survived.

- In Sparta, by contrast, where few written records were kept and where there was little need for the ability to read or write, most of the population was probably completely illiterate.

In *Ancient Literacy*, William Harris estimated that no more than 30 percent of the Athenian population ever achieved literacy.

- Between Athens at one end of the scale and Sparta at the other, there would have been a wide range of different levels of literacy, varying from one community to the next.¶ Certainly, mass literacy never existed on the scale that it does in most societies today, not even in Athens. Much more information was at all times and in all places passed down by word of mouth than by writing.**

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Harris, *Ancient Literacy*.

Langslow, "Languages and Dialects."

Mueller, *Greek 101*.

Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*.

¶ It's thought that very few women could read or write; they didn't receive any education.

** The historian Herodotus initially promulgated his *History* of the Greco-Persian Wars through oral recitation so that it would gain currency, and it may be that other prose writers did so as well.

LECTURE 23

# Eating and Drinking among the Greeks

Even if you've never been to Greece, there's a pretty good chance that you've come across moussaka or olive leaves or baklava or feta cheese in your wanderings. You may even have drunk retsina, the Greek wine that is named for the resin* it contains.

* The reason why resin was added goes back more than 2,000 years ago, when amphorae, two-handled jars that were used to store wine, were sealed with pine resin to keep them airtight. The resin taste subsequently became popular, so in time, resin became an additive for taste purposes.

# Ancient Greek Food

- Most ancient Greeks ate only two meals a day: a fairly light meal toward the middle of the day called *ariston*, which consisted of an assortment of olives, cheese, honey, bread, and fruit, generally washed down with diluted wine; and a heavier meal in the early evening called *deipnon*, also washed down with wine. Wine was a lot more trustworthy than water, and though the ancient Greeks didn't know much about germs, they did understand that water contained impurities.†

- Food was baked in hot ashes, boiled over a fire, fried, grilled, or roasted. Bread was the most important food. The grain was pounded in a mortar, perhaps made out of a hollowed-out tree trunk. This would often be the job of a female slave, who would use a stone, which she rolled back and forth across the grain, as the flour built up inside the basin. Then, she would bake the bread in an outdoor clay oven that rested on top of a charcoal brazier.

- Bread was made of barley, millet, oats, and, exceptionally, wheat. Because the soil is poor, ancient Greece produced only a small fraction as much wheat as it did barley. Most Greeks only ate wheat bread on festival days; they generally ate barley cakes.

- The shortage of grain meant that the Greeks were forced, perhaps as early as the Mycenaean age, to import from abroad. That's the most likely reason for the Trojan War: Mycenaean Greece's need to escape paying a crippling tariff to gain access to the rich, grain-producing lands around the southern shore of the Black Sea.

- Staple foods were olive oil, vegetables, soup, tripe, porridge, eggs, and a kind of soup made from the stomach of a cow or a sheep. Peas and beans were plentiful, as were fruit and nuts. There was no chocolate, sugar, bananas, tomatoes, rice, or potatoes.

† It was not safe to drink water in ancient Greece—or indeed anywhere in the world until the 19th century—though the Greeks did worship fountains and other sources of clean drinking water.

- Many Greeks had the chance to eat fresh meat only on festival occasions. It was the custom to distribute portions of the sacrificial victims to worshippers after the god in whose honor the sacrifice was being performed had received his or her due portion. As festivals were common, many Greeks got a bite of meat fairly frequently.

- Sausages were readily available, but they were no doubt stringy and the meat inside them probably a bit dodgy. Small pieces of meat were put into casseroles and stews, though the chief ingredients were beans and vegetables.

- Only the wealthy ate birds and fresh fish, and probably as a side dish rather than as a main course. We only hear of dessert being served at the symposium, or the drinking party. From all accounts, dessert mainly consisted of dried fruit and honey.

- Rich Greeks occasionally hired a professional cook. There were no restaurants or fast-food outlets in ancient Greece, though it was possible to purchase the ancient equivalent of souvlaki on a skewer, consisting of vegetables and scraps of meat.

- The Greeks prepared food in conditions that would turn our stomachs. They probably didn't bother to wash vegetables, and they'd probably consume both fish and meat long after their sell-by date.

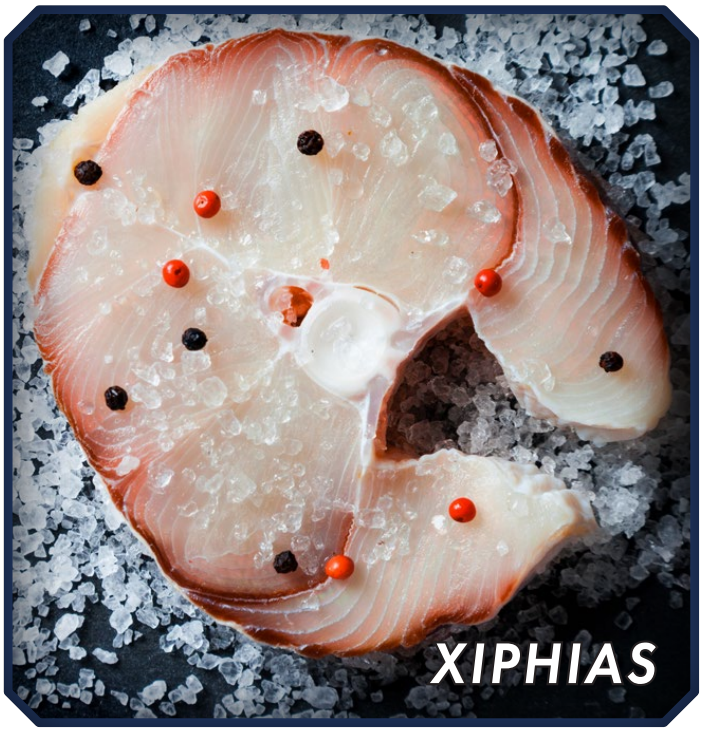
The Greeks may have invented chewing gum. Herodotus refers to the inhabitants of the island of Chios cultivating mastic, which Greeks chewed to whiten their teeth.

- They used a variety of cooking utensils, all made out of terra-cotta. These included covered pots of various sizes, frying pans, grills, kettles, cooking stands, and braziers. Charcoal and dried twigs were the most common source of fuel.

- As time passed, food preparation became more sophisticated. In the Hellenistic period, new fruits were introduced from the East, such as cherries, peaches, and lemons, and new spices were introduced from Persia. In the Roman Empire, Greek cooks were highly sought after.‡

## Greek Food Today

- When you go out to a Greek restaurant, try *kleftiko*, a very characteristic Greek dish with a patriotic history. *Kleftiko* means "the thing that was stolen," as in the first part of our word *kleptomaniac*. Its name and the dish itself derive from the period when the Greeks under Ottoman rule weren't permitted to own farm animals, so they would steal a lamb and cook it in a makeshift oven dug into the side of a hill, for example, so that it couldn't be seen. A rock was placed over the oven, and the lamb cooked slowly so that no smoke or savor would alert the Ottoman authorities.




- A variety of fish is served at Greek restaurants, including *barbounia*, or red mullet, and *xiphias*, or swordfish. There's also *kalamarakia*, which is fried squid.

‡ In the 3rd century CE, a Greek named Athenaeus wrote *Professors at Dinner*, an invaluable compendium of Greek cuisine and dining habits.

- A popular fast food is souvlaki,[§] which is meat and vegetables grilled on skewers. There's archaeological evidence for souvlaki that goes back to Santorini (ancient Thera) in the 17th century BCE. Another popular fast food is gyro, which derives from the Greek *guros*, meaning "circle." It refers to the fact that the meat is cooked on a revolving rotisserie.

- The Greeks also produce cheeses in abundance, though not a large variety of them are sold abroad. The most popular Greek cheese is feta, which is made in brine with sheep's, cow's, or goat's milk.

- An appetizer that's made from cheese is *saganaki*, which means "cooked in a small frying pan." The word derives from the Turkish *sahan*, which in turn derives from the Arabic word *sahn*. Another popular appetizer is *taramasalata*, which is made from fish roe mixed with olive oil and lemon with an olive on top. Dolmas are stuffed grape leaves; *dolmas* comes from the Turkish verb *dolmak*, meaning "to fill."

- There's also spanakopita, spinach pie with feta cheese and onions; hummus, a spread made out of crushed chickpeas mixed with sesame paste, called tahini; and tzatziki, a spread made of yogurt, cucumber, olive oil, garlic, and salt. Both *hummus* and *tahini* are Arabic words.

- Some of the most characteristic Greek dishes may be imports from Turkey and therefore Arabic in origin. *Moussaka*, which is made of meat and eggplant with a crusted béchamel sauce on top, derives from the

§ *Souvlaki* means "little skewer."

Arabic *musaqqa'a*, meaning "chilled." Though it's impossible to assert unequivocally that the dish is Turkish in origin, the first reference to a recipe appears in a Turkish cookbook dated 1862.

- *Baklava* is also a Turkish word. The pastry is made of slices of phyllo dough stacked on top of each other, filled with chopped nuts and drizzled with honey. One theory is that it originated in Istanbul, where the sultan presented trays of baklava to his imperial guard in the month of Ramadan; another is that it originated in Assyria in the 8th century BCE or even in China in the 14th century BCE.

- The origins of all these dishes are lost in the mists of time, and it's pointless to dispute their ethnic affiliation. They may well go back to the period of the Byzantine Empire or to the Roman Empire before it split into two.

- There seems to be a culinary continuum from antiquity to the present day extending from Greece to Iran. The previously mentioned dishes are often thought of as Greek because it was the Greeks who introduced them to the West following their expulsion from Turkey in 1922 as a result of the destruction of Smyrna.

## Greek Wine and Drinking Culture

- Like everything connected with the gods, wine—the gift of the god Dionysus—is both a boon and a bane. It can help you to forget your cares, but it can also cause you to be careless. So you have to treat it with respect.

- Serious drinking for the ancient Greeks wasn't just a case of getting together with your pals and getting drunk. It took place in a formal setting, known as a symposium, meaning "drinking together," and it was highly ritualized.

- We know a lot about symposia, partly because scenes on Greek vases depicting them far outnumber any other scene relating to daily life. An expensive set of decorated vases were de rigueur at any sophisticated symposium. We see scenes of men reclining, playing silly drunken games, being sick, having sex with women, and so on. Many are pornographic.

- The women depicted are hetaerae, or "female companions." Hetaerae were hired to entertain the drinkers and included dancers, flute girls, and prostitutes. No doubt a lot of hanky-panky went on at symposia between the guests—all male—and the hetaerae.¶ Freeborn women (wives, daughters, mothers, aunts, etc.) were not permitted to attend symposia.

- Drinkers did not sit but reclined on couches—a custom the Greeks adopted from the Middle East. The couches were placed adjoining the walls of the room, and each accommodated two or three people. This meant that you might have someone's feet poking you in the face, so a slave would wash the feet of all the guests upon their arrival.

- Well-to-do Greeks had a special room, known as an *andron*, meaning "a place for men," with an off-center entrance to accommodate the couches, where symposia took place.

- The drinking only began after the tables with the food on them had been cleared away and after libations—drink offerings to the gods—had been performed and a hymn sung.

- A symposiarch, or master of drinking, was appointed to ensure orderly behavior. This was done on the throw of a dice, so usually it would be one of the guests, not the host, who held this position. Since the Greeks always drank diluted wine,** his first duty would be to determine the parts of wine to water. The poet Hesiod recommended one part of wine to three parts of water as the ideal combination. The symposiarch would

¶ Many hetaerae were highly educated, such as Aspasia, who was the common-law wife of the leading statesman Pericles.

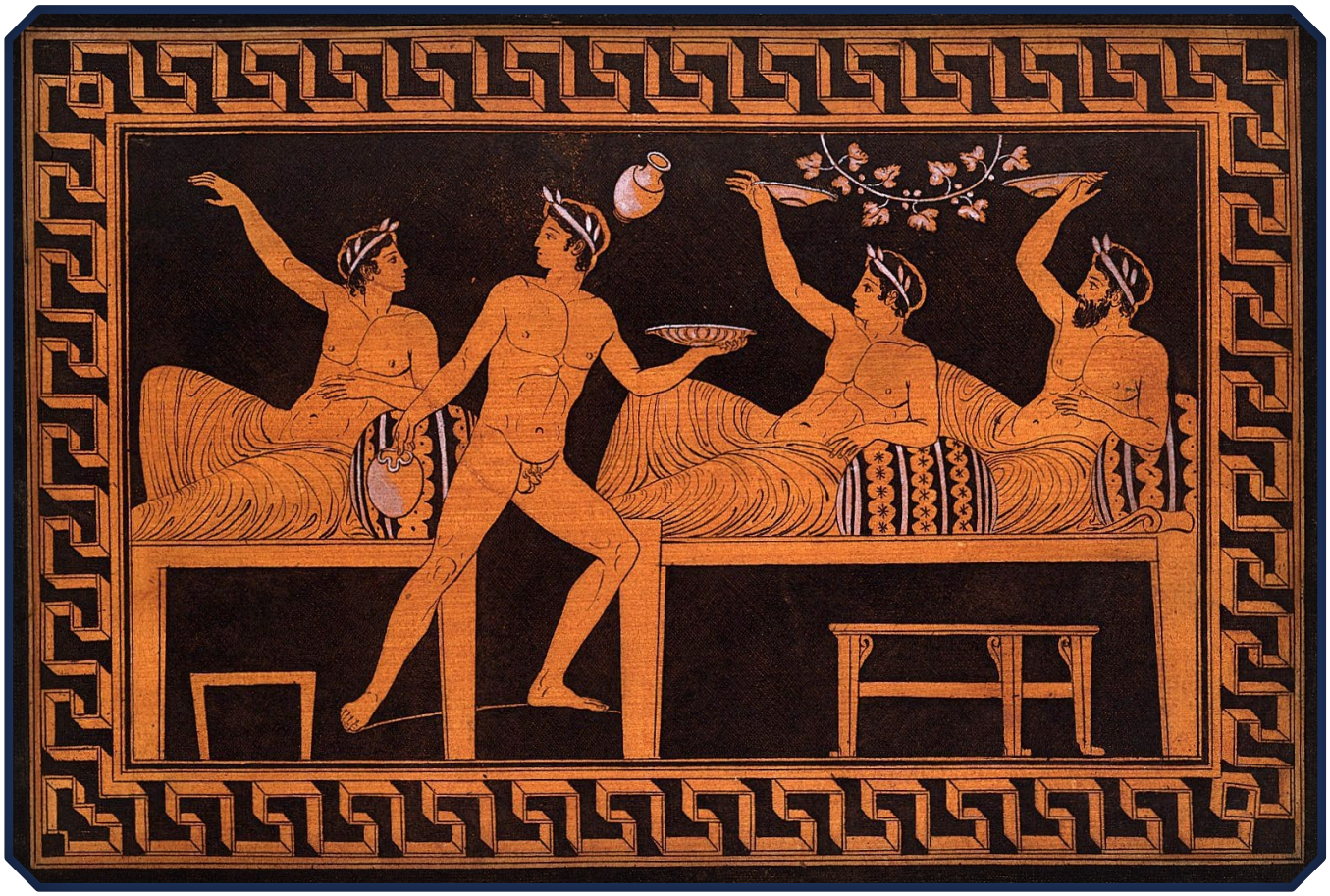
** There was a belief that drinking undiluted wine drove you insane. The medical writer Galen describes the case of a slave who got locked in his master's house without any water. He drank large quantities of wine, became feverish, and died in a delirium.

decree how many cups each symposiast should drink, since all of them had to drink the same amount and therefore experience the same degree of inebriation.

The biographer and moral philosopher Plutarch describes a symposium as "a passing of time over wine, which, guided by gracious behavior, ends in friendship."

- Some symposia were no doubt very boozy affairs that degenerated into orgies, but probably the majority were fairly decorous. The symposium, as much as any institution in the Greek world, fostered culture, as defined by a sense of refinement, playfulness, pleasure, and conviviality.

- The formal aspects of a symposium demonstrate clearly the deep respect with which Dionysus's gift was held by the Greeks. They knew what overindulgence led to, and they feared it. According to Herodotus, the queen of a nomadic people who lived in modern-day eastern Iran taxed the Persians with drinking wine "to the point of madness," with the result that when they got drunk, ugly words poured out of their mouths.



- A symposium was also a locus for the formation of homosexual attachments. Ancient Greece has a reputation for being a culture that fully accepted homosexual liaisons and activity, but that's not actually true. Homosexual liaisons and activity were almost certainly more prevalent in aristocratic circles than in nonaristocratic circles. Moreover, although homosexuality was acceptable as what anthropologists call an "episodic" phenomenon, a temporary phase of life, it was not acceptable as a permanent orientation. Greeks were under a strong obligation to perpetuate their family units, the *oikos* or *oikia*.

- Games were popular at the symposium. A number of these required a familiarity with literature. For instance, there was a game that required you to quote a line of poetry that began with the same letter as the letter that had ended the line previously quoted.

- A symposium couldn't draw to a close without a hymn being sung to Apollo and another to Hygieia, the personification of health. First and last, it was a religious gathering.

- There's evidence that the Greeks did some binge-drinking. In the *Odyssey*, Elpenor fell off Circe's roof when he woke up in the morning, evidently still plastered, and died in consequence.

- Some Greeks were likely alcoholics. Alexander the Great's drinking bouts were legendary. In one drunken bout, he killed his best friend Cleitus, who had saved his life in battle. Alexander wept for three days afterward. Certainly, drink precipitated his death, though scholars argue over whether he should actually be labeled an alcoholic.

- Herodotus reports that the Persians were "particularly fond of drinking wine," meaning presumably that their consumption was greater than that of the Greeks. He claims that they adopted the custom of deliberating on serious matters first when they were drunk and then the next day when they were sober. If they reached the same decision on both occasions, they followed through on their decision. If they didn't, they abandoned it.

LECTURE 24

# What Does Greece Mean to Us Today?

Ancient Greece has exerted a hypnotic power over the Western imagination for centuries. But philhellenism—the often-uncritical adulation of the whole Greek culture and the entire people—comes at the very high price of denying objective truth. So we must acknowledge the criticisms that some people level at the ancient Greeks. But we can also appreciate the many reasons we absolutely can't do without them.

# Criticisms of the Ancient Greeks

- Ancient Greece was a society that never questioned the rightness of slavery and was deeply paternalistic, chauvinistic, and sexist. It committed acts of genocide within its own modest technological limits, notably by sometimes killing all men and enslaving all women and children after a siege. It condoned the abandonment of newborn babies, girls especially.* It treated the deformed as evidence of a divine judgment passed on their parents. And it executed one of the greatest men of all time, Socrates.

- But are we so much better? And if we are, is it because we're nicer than the ancient Greeks? Today, many people try to do the right thing and not be sexist, racist, etc., but that's largely because we live in the 21st century, which means we're in a much more privileged situation than the ancient Greeks and can afford to do the right thing since we're not constantly having to make very difficult decisions about our survival.

- But it's impossible to avoid certain features of Greek society that are hot-button issues for the modern world.

- John Stuart Mill, an influential liberal thinker and philosopher of the 19th century, tried to circumnavigate the Greeks' acceptance of slavery by writing:

> Slavery in the ancient world was a very different thing from American and West Indian slavery. The slaves were not a separate race, marked out to the contempt of their masters by indelible physical differences.

- Mill admits that the institution was "odious" but that "it may have been, nevertheless, a great accelerator of progress."

- In other words, we might not have had the so-called Greek miracle—all that great art and literature and architecture and philosophy and democracy—if there hadn't been slaves to enable it to happen. While this may be true to some extent, it avoids the moral issue.

* We have no statistics to judge how common this practice was.

- In his *Politics*, Aristotle makes a distinction between what he calls natural and legal slavery: Natural slavery means you've been born into slavery, whereas legal slavery means you've become a slave because you were captured in war, or you were abducted by pirates, or your parents sold you into slavery, or you became indentured. Aristotle defines a natural slave as "a breathing piece of property." In his view, a so-called natural slave lacks human identity.

- But from both an intellectual and a moral point of view, we're in no position to judge the ancient world, not least because the record of our world is so poor. And to be fair, the Greeks were by no means unique in their acceptance of slavery. People born in Palestine or Persia or Greece or Rome or Egypt wouldn't have been able to envisage a world where slavery didn't exist.

- In addition to accepting slavery, the Greeks secluded and repressed women in various ways, though here again this was common to most ancient societies, just as it is to many modern ones. It took the West two and a half millennia before it really began to crack the hard nut of sexual prejudice. For example, in the US, women weren't awarded the vote† until 1920. And in Saudi Arabia today, women need a male relative's permission to work, open a bank account, marry, and travel.

- Another stick to beat the Greeks with is that theirs was a very elitist society. About 98 percent of the surviving Greek literature was written by elite males. The aristocracy held the upper hand, even in Athens, which was a full democracy. But again, it's only been in the last 200 years that modern Western literature has gradually become representative of society as a whole.

- There are other problems that have to do with the discipline of the classics. Those studying ancient Greek have sometimes, justifiably, been associated with white privilege. The origins for this go back a long way. In 1833, the South Carolina senator John Calhoun declared that only when he

† In the UK, women over the age of 30 got the vote in 1918—largely as a reward for their service in World War I, which had been crucial—but it wasn't until 1928 that women over the age of 21 got it.

could "find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax" could he be brought to "believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated like a man." This motivated Alexander Crummell, a free black errand boy who later became the founder of the first independent Episcopalian church in the US, to go to Cambridge, England, where he learned Greek.

- Another issue is the alleged racism of some classicists. In 1987, a British professor at Cornell University named Martin Bernal published a highly controversial book called *Black Athena*. Bernal's premise was that there had been a willful conspiracy of silence on the part of 18th- and 19th-century ancient historians and classicists to ignore, or at least minimize, the decisive contribution that the Afro-Asiatic peoples made to Greek culture.

- Bernal's criticism was ill founded. But he reminded us that all historical inquiry is contingent, provisional, and subjective. And he also demonstrated that the desire to claim cultural descent from the Greeks is very much alive and well.

## Arguments for Studying the Greeks

- With all the contentious politics underlying the study of the Greek world, there are still several reasons to justify giving it a privileged place in the curriculum.

- First, there's the argument for unsurpassed excellence.

- There are areas of human enterprise and endeavor in which the Greeks—the Athenians in particular—achieved excellence. They may have been equaled in these areas, but in none have they been surpassed. These include architecture, art, scientific inquiry, historiography, drama, epic poetry, lyric poetry, political theory, philosophy, and possibly music (if we had anything more than a few notes).

- This is all the more surprising in light of the fact that the Athenians, in the words of the British classics scholar H. D. F. Kitto, were "not very numerous, not very powerful, not very organized." Athens was tiny, even by ancient standards. Its territory was smaller than Rhode Island, the smallest American state. Its total population—including slaves, women, children, and foreigners—was about the size of Wichita, Kansas, though its citizen body, even at its peak, only amounted to 50,000 at the high estimate.

- The only society in human history that has come close to achieving what the Athenians achieved is Renaissance Florence, which was even smaller by its head count. Florence had an estimated population of only 80,000 before the Black Death broke out on the eve of the Renaissance.

- Moreover, the period of Athens's greatness lasted less than a century—shorter than the flourishing of Renaissance Florence—and during those years, the Athenians faced two life-or-death struggles, first with the Persians and then with the Spartans.

- They might so easily have decided to pack it all in and just concentrate on getting from one day to the next. But they didn't. They were in the grip of a vision of limitless human capacity. All that violence and unsettlement produced a flowering of human ingenuity and enterprise.

- Second, there's the argument for analogy.

- In many ways, the ancient Greeks were very similar to us. For starters, they practiced democracy, even though their model of direct, or participatory, democracy was very different from our model of representative democracy. But their model helps us grasp the limitations and challenges faced by our own, very watered down, system.

- And in their democratic debates, many of which have been preserved in Thucydides's *History*, they grappled with the same problems we deal with, such as how to conduct themselves in international relations, whom to trust as leaders, and how to conduct a war.

- There are many other ways in which we can draw parallels between them and us. For instance, the study of the treatment of the disabled in ancient Greece, laced as it was with prejudice, can help us become better aware of the challenges that face the disabled in contemporary society. Similarly, teaching the status and treatment of women in ancient Greece helps us better understand the obstacles that women have faced for millennia.

- At the same time, we should never forget that life in the ancient world imposed certain attitudes on people, and this should not be confused with prejudice. It required them to behave very differently from the way people conduct themselves today. Women were extremely vulnerable, and the fact that they were physically weaker than men meant that the viability of the household might at times require preference being given to boys over girls.

- In order to understand and do justice to the ancients, we have an obligation to suspend our 21st-century sensibility. And the only reason we can subject the Greeks, primarily the Athenians, to such intense scrutiny is that they were so articulate and that, despite large gaps in our evidence, they have left us such a rich storehouse of data on so many issues.

- Third, there's the argument for engaged humanism.

- Imagining how others lived in circumstances that in some aspects closely resemble ours and in others are vastly different from ours is an inherently valuable, and indeed humanizing, enterprise.

- Studying the Greeks is a humanizing exercise on so many levels. It's humbling from the point of view of both how much was achieved in the ancient world and how similar we are to them. It therefore helps us understand our own shared human nature.

The value of his *History*, Thucydides said, was that it dealt with events that will recur "so long as human nature stays the same"—in other words, forever.

- The fourth reason for studying the Greeks is the argument for indebtedness.

- The ancient world is still very much alive. It's all around us, in fact, if we only take the time to look. So many things that we value wouldn't exist but for the Greeks, including Dante's *Inferno*, Michelangelo's *David*, much of the Renaissance, Shakespeare, Milton, Greek Revival architecture, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

- Then there are the ideas and the inspiration. Thomas Jefferson borrowed the idea of the pursuit of happiness from Aristotle. Toussaint Louverture was inspired by Plutarch's account of Spartacus to lead the first successful slave revolt in Haiti in 1791. Suffragettes agitating for votes for women recited at their meetings the speech that Medea delivers in Euripides's play on the economic, political, and sexual repression of women.

- Modernity and the modern experience have been defined very largely by words of Greek origin, including *psychiatry*, *paranoia*, *pornography*, *euthanasia*, *cybernetics*, *prosthetics*, *chemotherapy*, *cryogenics*, *pediatrics*, *gynecology*, and *geriatrics*.

- And what about Greek mythology? Do you know of a richer or more colorful or more insightful literary genre that can be interpreted in so many different ways?

- And let's not forget the impact of the ancient Greeks on popular culture. Wikipedia lists more than 50 films set in ancient Greece, including Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004), Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), Zack Snyder's *300* (2006), and Noam Murro's *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014).

- There are also video games inspired by ancient Greece, such as *Spartan: Total Warrior*, *300: March to Glory*, *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*, *Wrath of the Gods*, and *Age of Mythology*.

- Then there are novels inspired by ancient Greece, including Madeline Miller's *Song of Achilles*, narrated by Achilles's companion Patroclus; Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, which looks at the *Odyssey* from the perspective of Penelope; Zachary Mason's *Lost Books of the Odyssey*, which

claims to contain versions of the poem handed down through the centuries by the enlightened few; and Mary Renault's *The King Must Die* and *The Last of the Wine*.

- The fifth reason for studying the Greeks is the sheer beauty and wonder of their civilization. The Greeks may have been pagans, as we call them, but their paganism inspired them to achieve wonderful things in the name of their gods—every bit as wonderful as anything achieved by any other belief system. And everything that the Greeks did was against a background of infinite precariousness, the like of which we can hardly fathom today.

- Classics professor Tim Parkin estimates that in ancient society, because of the very low life expectancy, one-third of the population was less than 15 years old. This compares with about 19 percent in the developed world today. He estimates that only about 7 percent of the population attained the age of 60 or over, compared with 21 percent of the population of the US or the UK today, though that percentage is set to double over the next 40 years. In classical antiquity, death was everywhere, relentlessly stalking people and their loved ones. And this made life infinitely precious.

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